

**ASPECTS OF CHILDREN'S LANGUAGE  
IN NATIONAL CURRICULUM ENGLISH**

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**Doctor of Philosophy**

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DECLARATION

I declare that all the material in this thesis which is not my own has, to the best of my ability, been acknowledged. The material in the thesis has not been submitted previously by the author for a degree at this or any other university.

Signed: .....*John R. Williamson*.....

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## **DOCTORAL STATEMENT**

## Introduction

No subject in the National Curriculum has been the source of more controversy than English. It has been at the heart of fierce debates in the political arena, amongst the policy makers responsible for the National Curriculum, in the academic world and in the media. Underlying these arguments have been, on the one hand, an agreement that English is a subject of special importance in the curriculum and, on the other, often profound disagreements about what the nature of that subject ought to be.

At the same time, there has been a tendency for policy to be made without reference to evidence about the necessity, the feasibility or even the desirability of the proposals being put forward. In the main, the work presented in this submission provides evidence relevant to the National Curriculum for English as it has developed over the last six years.

The coherence of this submission springs from two sources. There is, first, an overarching concern with the subject English and with what that subject might consist of. This has involved both exploring the underlying bases of National Curriculum English and also providing a knowledge base relevant to testing the often unsubstantiated assertions about the more linguistically oriented elements of the curriculum, particularly in relation to standard English and the teaching of grammar. Secondly, underlying all the work is a firmly held belief in the importance of language as a field of study worthy of engagement because of its centrality to human experience. As Descartes noted in 1637, 'It is a very remarkable fact that there are none so depraved and stupid, without even excepting idiots, that they cannot arrange different words together, forming of them a statement by which they make known their thoughts; while, on the other hand, there is no animal, however perfect

and fortunately circumstanced it may be, which can do the same.' Underlying all the work presented here is the conviction that it is of the utmost importance that the pupils in our schools are provided with appropriate opportunities to develop to the greatest extent possible their understanding of the language which will be an integral part of so much of their experience of life.

The original version of the National Curriculum for English met with general approval amongst teachers of English for reasons which are well encapsulated by Minns and Dombey (1988) in their commentary on it (DES, 1988). They found the report 'reassuring' because it 'recognises and builds on existing good practice...takes a clear stand on multicultural issues...puts good literature at the heart of English teaching...respects non-standard dialects and non-standard dialect users...reconciles the role of education in promoting personal development with its function in preparing children for living and working in a democracy...pays significant attention to drama, media studies and information technology.' Not all of these points of commendation are uncontroversial in themselves - in particular the emphasis on 'good' literature being at the heart of English is challenged by papers in the present submission (for a fuller discussion of the extensive literature on this topic than is possible here see Davies, 1989 and 1992). Yet the National Curriculum Council, even when arguing the case for revision concedes that 'the English Order has made a significant contribution to English teaching and that *it is supported by many teachers*' (NCC, 1992, p2) (my italics).

The same document (p4) iterates a view of the importance of standard English which is central to much of the research presented here:

'The phrase 'standard English' refers to the grammatically correct language used in formal communication throughout the world. To become competent users of standard English, pupils need to be taught to recognise its characteristics and the rules which govern its usage. The one explicit reference to standard English in the statements of attainment [in the original National Curriculum] focuses on the need to develop 'an awareness of grammatical differences between spoken standard English and a non-standard variety' (level 6). This is not the same thing as being able to use standard English in conversation and will not necessarily encourage pupils to speak clearly, accurately and confidently. There is a case, therefore, for strengthening the references to the mastery of standard English in the statements of attainment and programmes of study, and, more specifically, for requiring children to use standard English before level 5. These requirements need to be based on a clear definition of standard English.'

I have quoted this paragraph in its entirety because it exemplifies some of the woolly thinking and misinformation which were current at the time it was published. The equation of standard English with 'grammatically correct language', the assumption that there is one world-wide standard English, the idea that explicit knowledge of the grammatical rules of a dialect is a prerequisite for speaking or writing in that dialect, the linking of speaking in standard English with 'speaking clearly, accurately and confidently' - all these throw into doubt the writers' level of sociolinguistic knowledge.

The paragraph was taken from the section on speaking and listening; in contrast, the sections on writing and 'Knowledge about language and the teaching of spelling and grammar' (pp 6-7 and 7-8) are surprisingly reticent about standard English. There may be two reasons for this. In the first place,



the National Curriculum Council is concerned here to proffer the case for revising the original National Curriculum for English and that curriculum gave much more emphasis to standard English in writing than in speech and so may not have been felt to be in great need of change. Further, the paper does stress the importance of writing grammatically (NCC, 1992, pp 6,7,8 and 12) and since writing in standard English and writing grammatically were taken to be one and the same thing, it appeared that no more need be said.

By September of the following year, it was clear that there *was* a need to spell out the place of standard English more explicitly. The National Curriculum Council's Consultation Report (NCC, 1993) devotes a whole page to it as a preamble to attainment targets and programmes of study: 'All pupils need to be able to speak, write and read standard English fluently and accurately (NCC, 1993, p 15).' It is not explained why pupils can get by without listening to standard English. Although the Note on Standard English (p16) shows some awareness of such factors as linguistic change over time, differences between spoken and written language and the distinction between accent and dialect, there is still a tendency to view standard English from a highly prescriptive viewpoint:

'Core grammatical features of Standard English include subject verb agreement, correct and consistent use of verb tenses, correct use of pronouns, adverbs and adjectives. In spoken Standard English significant features are standard forms of irregular verbs; agreement between person, case and number (especially with the verb 'to be'); the correct use of pronouns' (NCC, 1993, p 16).

Apart from the naiveté implicit in, for example, the assumption that non-standard dialects do not feature subject-verb concord, the recurrent

association of 'standard' and 'correct' makes for a very narrow view of what constitutes English as a language which is not corrected by the arguably tokenistic statement that 'The richness of dialects and languages in England and Wales can contribute to pupils' understanding and knowledge of language' (p 16).

Parallel to the emphasis on standard English is the demand for pupils to develop their knowledge about grammar. The revised National Curriculum for English contains an element in each profile component for each age range entitled 'Standard English and Language Study'. Even at Key Stage 1, pupils should, for example, 'be introduced to some of the features that distinguish standard English, including subject-verb agreement and the use of the verb 'to be' in past and present tenses' (DFE, 1995, p5). By Key Stage 2, 'Pupils should be given opportunities to develop their understanding of the grammar of complex sentences, including clauses and phrases' and 'should be taught to use the standard written forms of nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, conjunctions and verb tenses' (DFE, 1995, p16). At Key Stages 3 and 4, 'Pupils should be encouraged to broaden their understanding of the principles of sentence grammar and be taught to organise whole texts effectively' (DFE, 1995, p24).

This Introduction has identified several main issues: the lack of research support for much of the curriculum change which has taken place in recent years; the need for a framework for English which will provide a coherent rationale for the subject; the importance of a clearer understanding of some of the implications of the prescriptions of the National Curriculum for English.

The following detailed outline of the research submitted here shows how the papers engage with these issues. I first clarify my contribution to the papers

co-authored with Frank Hardman and Clare Woodall. During the period covered by this submission, Dr. Hardman was working on his own doctoral thesis on differences between teaching styles in A-level English Language and English Literature and consequently made a rather smaller contribution to these papers than might otherwise have been the case (the statements on co-authorship give more details on this point.) In general, my contribution to the partnership is centred on my linguistic expertise and so the bulk of the work on standard English and non-standard dialects has been mine, as has the exploration of grammar in Williamson and Hardman (1995). Two of the other papers (Hardman and Williamson, 1993 and Williamson and Hardman 1994) involved the gathering of data about the attitudes to English teaching of teachers and student teachers. I played a major part in the design of these investigations and in the gathering and analysis of data and in the writing of the finished articles. The final two papers, Hardman and Williamson (1997) and Williamson and Woodall (1996) were both the result of extensive discussion and joint writing.

## Papers

The paper by Williamson and Woodall (1996) provides a critical analysis of the current National Curriculum for English. This critique both suggests that the revised orders for English lack a coherent underpinning concept of the subject and also that they have been influenced by elements of conservative ideology which have been discussed above. This is of particular relevance to the emphasis given to standard English, an emphasis which is rooted neither in empirical evidence nor in an understanding of sociolinguistic theory.

Williamson and Woodall argue that the National Curriculum's emphasis on the centrality of inducing pupils to speak and write in standard English is essentially misplaced; rather, it is argued, the study of standard English



should be seen as part of a wider critical engagement with language as it impacts on the life of pupils at the end of the twentieth century. This would not preclude study of the literary heritage, which is also accorded a special, protected place in the National Curriculum for English, but would see it as part of, and not inherently distinct from, a wider concept of critical literacy which would engage pupils in the study of all of the aspects of language with which they need to engage.

Hardman and Williamson (1997) place this multi-genre approach to the teaching of English in the wider context of prevailing orthodoxies in the field of English, both at school and university level. The disjunction between the Leavisite values of many teachers and the critical approaches of some university English departments is seen as part of the breakdown of consensus about what constitutes the subject 'English'. We argue that the study of texts should be at the heart of the English curriculum so that students can be equipped to deal with an increasingly media-rich environment. This paper goes beyond Williamson and Woodall (1996) in considering the implications of such a view of English teaching for the training of teachers. It is our experience that English graduates come to secondary PGCE courses with very different experiences of the subject not all of which are relevant to what will form the basis of their pedagogical practice. At a time when the first National Curriculum for trainee teachers of English at secondary level is due to follow the recently published version for primary English, it is to be hoped that clear thought will be given to the issue of subject knowledge and the nature of the gap between school and university (and indeed between universities themselves) when proposals are drawn up.

Hardman and Williamson (1993) report research into the attitudes of just such a group of trainee teachers of English in the secondary phase. The



investigation was framed by the five models of English teaching which underpinned the Cox Report (DES 1989) and consequently the original National Curriculum in English. We adapted a questionnaire devised by Goodwyn (1992) to study practising teachers and found a similar tendency for respondents to favour the personal growth and critical analysis models, with the former being cited by both groups as having the highest priority, cultural analysis coming second on both occasions. The lowest priority for both groups was the cultural heritage model. The overall findings of our research are of interest first of all in elucidating possible trends among graduate trainee teachers who will form the backbone of school English departments for the coming decades and secondly in suggesting that the views of the profession are not necessarily at one with those of the official bodies which lay down the curriculum.

As was suggested in the Introduction, the original National Curriculum for English attracted enough criticism to bring about an early revision. In part, the tenor of one aspect of the discontent felt in conservative circles is neatly encapsulated in the preamble to *English in the National Curriculum: Draft Proposals* written by the then Secretary of State for Education, John Patten. Mr Patten proposed

'to include in other appropriate subject Orders, in addition to the Orders for English, a reference to the need for teachers to give attention to the quality of pupils' English in the course of their work on these subjects. Such is the need to raise standards of literacy that I believe it is vital that teachers of other subjects, in addition to English teachers, should take every opportunity to improve their pupils' ability to speak and write correct English, not least so that pupils can gain full benefit from every subject' (SCAA, 1994, no page number).

This clear statement of an essentially prescriptive view of English teaching, explicitly cast in the mode of Cox's cross curricular model, lacks any sense of the complexity of the concept of correctness in language, of the nature of the contribution which might be made to language development by teachers other than English teachers or of the work already being done by English teachers themselves. The paper by Williamson and Hardman (1994) must be seen against this background of official dissatisfaction and the consequent process of review. The research reported in that paper produced evidence from sixty teachers on their thinking and classroom practice in the context of the first National Curriculum for English. Our main conclusion was consonant with the findings of Hardman and Williamson (1993) and of Goodwyn (1992): 'English teachers favour a broad approach to the curriculum in which personal response to and critical analysis of a wide range of literary, media and non-media texts are seen as essential to ensure the personal growth of the pupil' (Williamson and Hardman, 1994, p.244). Such a conclusion, and the wealth of detailed insight into the nature of English teaching provided by the teachers studied in this research, is in marked contrast to the stark, but misplaced, simplicity of Mr. Patten's view.

A major element of the rationale of much of the opposition to the Cox curriculum was the belief that standards of English were slipping and that there was a need to stem the tide by teaching grammar. Marenbon (1987, p 35) sets out that belief with unusual clarity:

'But the teacher who (disregarding the new orthodoxy) sets about making his pupils learn correct standard English, would find his task very difficult if he did not make them familiar with certain grammatical terms; terms with which he can frame rules which

describe standard English usage, and so prescribe to those who are learning standard English. His pupils will need to learn to distinguish nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, conjunctions, prepositions and exclamations; to identify subjects, objects and predicates; singulars and plurals; past, present, future; indicative, conditional and imperative; phrases, clauses and sentences.'

Although framed *before* the Cox Report, it is striking how close Marenbon's prescription comes to the consultation document on the curriculum (SCAA, 1994), the revised version of the National Curriculum for English (DFE, 1995) and, most recently, the National Curriculum for Initial Teacher Training with its requirement that student teachers must, by the end of their PGCE course, 'demonstrate that they know and understand...the grammatical function of words/phrases in clauses and sentences *e.g. subject, conjunctions, verbs, nouns, adverbs, predicates etc.*' (DfEE, 1997, para 11, section C, Annexe B). The first of these documents enjoins that even at Key Stage 1 pupils should be taught about subject-verb agreement (there is no mention of why this should be of any value) and the 'use of the verb 'to be' in the past and present tenses' (SCAA, 1994, p 21). By Key Stage 2, 'Pupils should begin to develop their understanding of sentence grammar, specifically the syntax of complex sentences, including clauses and phrases. They should also be taught how to use paragraphs, linking sentences together coherently. They should also be taught to use correctly nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, conjunctions, singular/plural forms and verb tenses' (SCAA, 1994, p 24).

The impetus for Williamson and Hardman (1995) came from that SCAA paper and, more generally, contributed to the ongoing debate about the teaching of grammar. The research involved a study of levels of some aspects of grammatical knowledge among ninety-nine trainee primary school teachers.



This was of interest for two reasons. Primarily we were concerned to see whether new entrants to the profession would have the levels of knowledge about grammar themselves which would enable them to meet the requirements of the revised National Curriculum for English. The investigation would also shed light on the level of grammar teaching which had taken place during these students' schooling for most of them had not studied language during their degree courses. Our results suggested a higher level of knowledge than some critics would have suggested, although significant gaps were found which relate directly to the knowledge necessary for the implementation of the National Curriculum. We concluded that the deficits relative to the National Curriculum were such as to imply that there was need for a substantial input in initial training and if, as seemed probable, our findings would apply to practising teachers as well, then there was a need for in-service provision. It is interesting to note that the National Curriculum for Initial Teacher Training (DfEE, 1997), in its section on Subject Knowledge, takes a very similar line.

The explicit teaching of grammar was part of Marenbon's recipe for English because of its assumed role in helping teachers to produce young users of standard English. This is a view which has held sway in official pronouncements since the very first report of the Cox Working Group (DES, 1988, p iii). In the preamble to that report the Secretaries of State for Education and Science and for Wales note,

'We strongly endorse [the Working Group's] firm statement that it is a clear responsibility of the English curriculum to extend children's use of varieties of language, to develop their capability to understand written and spoken Standard English and to teach them to write in conventional Standard English...The objectives should be to ensure that

by the end of their period of compulsory education, pupils can appreciate the differences between the forms of spoken and written English and their appropriate use, and in particular that they are equipped for adult life and employment by being able to write formal Standard English.'

Although the preamble to the final Cox Report (DES, 1989) does not contain any reference to standard English, the report itself repeats verbatim (except for bold type in the second version and avoidance of a rather quaint use of 'capability' found in the earlier text) a central view on the relationship between standard English and the National Curriculum: 'The development of pupils' ability to understand written and spoken Standard English and to produce written Standard English is unquestionably a responsibility of the English curriculum' (DES, 1988, p 14 and DES 1989, para 4.34). Naturally enough these statements had an impact on the original National Curriculum for English (DES, 1990) which includes requirements pertinent to writing in standard English from level 4 (that attained by a typical pupil of 11 years of age) onward. So we see that 'Pupils should be able to...begin to use the structures of written Standard English' at level 4; 'demonstrate increased effectiveness in the use of Standard English' at level 5; 'demonstrate the ability to use literary stylistic features and those which characterise an impersonal style, when appropriate, using Standard English' at level 6 and so on up to and including level 10, the highest attainable.

It might have been thought that, regardless of the wisdom of these precepts, an issue which shall be returned to, there was no need greatly to strengthen them. Such a view would however have been misguided. The NCC report of 1993 proposed a radical strengthening of the provisions for the teaching of standard English and concludes its section on standard English by noting,

(NCC, 1993, p 10) that 'the statements of attainment as a whole have an overarching preamble which makes clear that pupils are required to use Standard English from Key Stage 1'. The revised version of the National Curriculum for English accordingly increased the emphasis on standard English by making it a separate component of the English curriculum at each Key Stage and for each profile component. The document notes (SCAA, 1994. p iii), 'The approach to standard English...stresses the significance of standard English and the concern that all pupils should be able to speak and write it fluently.' One new element here is the need for pupils to speak in standard English, a prescription which the Cox Report wisely avoided but of more concern to the present work is simply the increased emphasis on writing in standard English.

Again, the precepts of the report became the prescriptions of the National Curriculum and we find now that, rather than beginning to use standard English at the end of Key Stage 2, pupils are expected by that point to have been 'given opportunities to consider how written standard English varies in degrees of formality' (DFE, 1995, p 16), having already, at Key Stage 1, been introduced 'to the vocabulary, grammar and structures of written standard English' (DFE, 1995, p 10).

This background of escalating emphasis on standard English has been covered in some detail here because it is that background which gave the impetus for the last three pieces of research offered in this submission, all of which explore the extent to which the requirements for teachers to engage themselves in inducing pupils to write in standard English is necessary or valuable.



Williamson (1995), Williamson and Hardman (in press (a)) and Williamson and Hardman (in press (b)) all arise from a concern to establish whether there is a genuine need for teachers to be regulated into increasing their efforts to assist pupils to write standard English. All three of these pieces explore the incidence of non-standard dialect forms in children's writing: Williamson (1995) is a study of one age range in one area, the other two were funded by an ESRC Research Grant, for which project I was the Principal Investigator, and have formed the basis of a SCAA publication (Williamson and Hardman, 1997). These papers report a much larger scale study of two age ranges and four regions of England. All suggest that the emphasis on standard English in the National Curriculum is excessive and that non-standard dialect has a relatively slight effect on writing. The evidence indicates that if teachers of English want to improve their pupils' ability to write in conformity with convention then they will gain far more by an emphasis on spelling and punctuation than they will by focusing on the relatively rare uses of non-standard dialect features. Williamson and Hardman (in press (b)) also provide evidence of the process of dialect levelling which has been noted by other studies in this field (for example, Cheshire, Edwards and Whittle, 1993, Hudson and Holmes, 1995).

What is clear from the research outlined in the previous paragraph is that if we consider the evidence from the papers mentioned there we can see, first of all, that the emphasis given to writing in standard English in the curriculum documents surveyed here is at best unnecessary and at worst counter-productive because it is diverting teachers away from matters of more significance. This work clearly shows that all users of English, even those who use some non-standard forms in their writing, are predominantly users of standard English and use that dialect for the vast preponderance of their writing. We are not talking of 'a conglomerate language, which was never

before spoken or written' (Marenbon, 1987, p 23) but of a very restricted range of features quite infrequently used.

At the suggestion of the external examiners of this thesis, two further papers have been included as appendices. The first, Williamson (1990) (Appendix 1), is included so as to give a full picture of my work on standard English and non-standard dialects. The findings, based on writing produced by 11 year-olds from Tyneside, are very much in tune with those of the later papers. The second (Williamson, 1992 (Appendix 2)) reflects another aspect of my work, the education of bilingual pupils. This paper, based on semi-structured interviews of teachers of bilingual pupils explores the relative merits of helping bilingual learners by withdrawing them for special provision as against supporting them in mainstream classes. The paper explores some of the practical difficulties faced by support teachers working with mainstream colleagues.

## Conclusion

This doctoral statement has, in large part, sought to contextualise the research submitted by relating it to major debates concerning the teaching of English during the last six years, the period during which the research was undertaken. The emphasis has largely been on official pronouncements on the National Curriculum for English because it has been these which have determined the course to be followed by teachers of English. I would argue that there has been a great need for such a study of the issues underlying the changes which have taken place. It seems clear that such work will have to carry on into the future given the promise of David Blunkett, then Shadow Secretary of State for Education and Employment, in February 1997 (p3), that the primary school curriculum will be 'reviewed for the millennium.'



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**A Vision for English: rethinking the revised National Curriculum in the  
light of contemporary critical theory**

**John Williamson and Clare Woodall**

*English in Education*, (1996), Vol 30, No 3, pp 4-13



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# A Vision for English: Rethinking the Revised National Curriculum in the Light of Contemporary Critical Theory

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## Abstract

This article seeks to formulate a coherent view of English which is based on an analysis of pupils' experience of language in its social and cultural setting. It is argued that the revised National Curriculum, although influenced by conservative ideologies, has no fundamental rationale underpinning its prescriptions. We make the case that a concept of critical literacy, which would be applicable to all texts, should constitute the foundation of the subject.

## Key words

Personal growth, cross-curricular, adult needs, cultural heritage, cultural analysis, National Curriculum

## Introduction

The controversies surrounding the ingredients of an English curriculum are generated not simply by conflicting views on the content of the English syllabus but by commitment to often strongly held beliefs about the purpose of education itself. We wish to argue here that active learning, critical thinking and cultural analysis must be at the centre of English teaching because they provide the conceptual and cognitive strategies which enable learners to understand their position in the world in so far as that is influenced by, and mediated through, language. The revised English Order (DfE, 1995) differs from the original *English in the National Curriculum* (DES, 1990) in that, whereas the latter can clearly be seen to have been derived from the reports of the Cox committee (DES, 1988, 1989), the former has no such explicitly acknowledged rational underpinning.

The Cox Report (DES, 1989, 2.20–2.26) outlines five models of English

teaching which are of relevance to our discussion: 'a "*personal growth*" view focuses on the child: it emphasises the relationship between language and learning in the individual child, and the role of literature in developing children's imaginative and aesthetic lives.' The '*cross-curricular*' view emphasises the role of the English teacher in helping pupils meet the language demands of different school subjects. The '*adult needs*' view centres on 'the responsibility of English teachers to prepare children for the language demands of adult life, including the workplace, in a fast-changing world'. 'A "*cultural heritage*" view emphasises the responsibility of schools to lead children to an appreciation of those works of literature that have been widely regarded as amongst the finest in the language.' Finally, 'a "*cultural analysis*" view emphasises the role of English in helping children towards a critical understanding of the world and cultural environment in which they live'.

Although both versions of the National Curriculum in English claim to have promoted a development in pupils' critical understanding of the world, we would argue that their concept of critical understanding is severely limited; for instance, the Programme of Study for Reading at Key Stages 3 and 4, which extends to four pages of the curriculum booklet, includes as its sole reference to non-literary texts:

*Pupils should be introduced to a wide range of media, eg magazines, newspapers, radio, television, film. They should be given opportunities to analyse and evaluate such material, which should be of high quality and represent a range of forms and purposes, and different structural and presentational devices. (DfE, 1995, p. 20)*

We will argue that this is inadequate not only in terms of the implied weight to be given to analysis of the communication systems of the modern world, nor only in terms of the narrow and circumscribed focus of the programme of study but, more centrally, because the approach advocated is limiting rather than liberating for the learner.

The revised English Order is based on a hotch-potch of elements from the first four of the Cox models of English outlined above. We propose to consider each in turn and show that, individually and collectively, they are lacking in credibility as foundations for the curriculum. What is required is a reconception of what the subject English might be in order that we might engage with the politics of culture which structure our experience of life and personal identity.

### Limitations of the National Curriculum for English

One consequence of a minimalist curriculum document is sterile language which hardly engages or sustains the reader's interest but whose tone is appropriate for the starkness of vision in the statements. Such a banal concept of literacy and oracy reduces the possibilities that an effective English programme can open up for learners. The lack of vision is, moreover, made more acute by the absence of an immediate context. Adrift from the extensive rationale which the Cox report elaborated to underpin the previous National Curriculum, the revised Order is, ironically, characterised by a loss of clarity. The Writing programme looks for commitment and vitality (DfE, 1995, p. 23) yet the precise meaning of these terms is left open to interpretation. With equal vagueness, the Reading programme claims students should be able to appreciate the 'distinctive qualities' of literature, use texts which show 'quality in language use' and 'appreciate the characteristics that distinguish



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literature of high quality' (ibid., pp. 20–21). On the one hand, teachers can celebrate this vagueness because it allows them some freedom of interpretation. But, on a more disturbing note, the document embodies assumptions about English in the statements which, without any rationale, are presented as self-evident truths, not open to negotiation.

#### *The personal growth model*

In the personal growth model, education is perceived as liberating because it provides learners with a knowledge of themselves and others along with relevant skills which enable them to participate in a democratic society. However, the personal growth view of English teaching, which dominates current practices (see, for example, Goodwyn, 1992; Hardman and Williamson, 1993; Williamson and Hardman, 1994), is far from liberating. This is because it comes from the tradition of Western humanism which stresses personal attitudes and personal responsibility at the expense of social forces, seeing the self and society as separate entities and failing to address the politics of culture which actively structure both personal and social identities. We argue for a reconceptualisation of personal growth alongside a deconstruction of Western humanism, which believes in individual rather than cultural subjects. This is not to deny individuality but rather to demand that learners must know themselves in the process of knowing. A sense of self must be accompanied by a knowledge of how that perception is radically affected through being structured according to inequalities of race, gender and class. Only when students have a critical awareness of the politics of culture can they have a true understanding of their own position.

The philosophy of the personal growth view is centred on how learners can 'grow through literature, both emotionally and aesthetically, both morally and socially – by virtue of coming into contact with a range of possible thought and feeling' (Cox, 1991, p. 76). It draws on Leavisite views of literature as capable of fostering intelligence and sensibility through personal response. But, as any honest teacher of English knows, personal response is essentially a fallacy because all response is at least mediated, and to a large extent programmed, both by a range of cultural practices, attitudes and beliefs which enmesh reading and also by the demands of the discipline of literary studies itself. As Peim (1993, p. 180) suggests, 'Responses to texts are conditioned by all sorts of impersonal factors, and responses in English are conditioned by the habits of thought that are legitimated by the order determined by the subject's institutionalized identity.' Indeed, it is difficult to see how it would be possible to formulate assessment criteria without a system for evaluating – giving value to – certain responses rather than others.

It comes as no surprise that the revised Order for English deals with literature and media as distinct categories. The benefits of literature are seen as humanising while those of the media are discriminatory. Pupils should be encouraged to 'appreciate the characteristics that distinguish literature of high quality' (DfE, 1995, p. 21), but to 'analyse and evaluate' a wide range of media texts (ibid., p. 20). But once the myth of literary sensibility and its correlation, personal growth, is exposed by critical theories, the study of literature is immediately politicised. It is not tenable to confine cultural analysis to the media; literature also has social, political and cultural contexts which must be explored critically. Rather than asking pupils to feign liberal humanist appreciation or



regurgitate set responses, we should approach literature by examining the cultural politics of texts. This would open up fields of study, leading to the creation of useful knowledge and making the study of literature relevant to learners' experiences.

*The adult needs and cross-curricular models*

One of the most striking features of the revised Order is the emphasis placed on 'Standard English and Language Study' which is present in every section of the curriculum. The Cox Report (DES, 1989, 4.32) analyses the potential relationships between school policies on standard English and the five models of English teaching outlined in our introduction; the revised curriculum operates on only one of the three bases recognised by Cox: 'The [cross-curricular] and [adult needs] views emphasise the importance of using Standard English for wider communication, inside and outside school.' In fact, standard English is the only element in the curriculum for which an explicit rationale is offered: 'In order to participate confidently in public, cultural and working life, pupils need to be able to speak, write and read standard English fluently and accurately' (DfE, 1995, p. 2). The vocational impetus behind this statement underlies the whole curriculum document, given the foregrounding of standard English in every programme of study.

Disturbing assumptions surround the references to standard English. The Cox Report recognised that standard English was a sensitive issue and took care to acknowledge the crucial connection between language and identity, insisting that the pupil's own dialect must be valued and recognising that developing spoken standard English is a complex and difficult task. As Cheshire and Milroy (1993, p. 26) note, in their discussion of the Cox Report:

*variation in language is part of a well-organized and structured language system, occurring in specific linguistic contexts ... Since structured variation of this kind is unconscious it is likely to be beyond our conscious control, and therefore it is naive in the extreme to suppose that children could be taught to readily substitute one form for another.*



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The revised Order shows no such sensitivity to linguistic or social nuances. Standard English becomes a norm by which other dialects are measured: 'The richness of dialects and other languages can make an important contribution to pupils' knowledge of standard English' (DfE, 1995, p. 2). The cognitive, affective and social benefits of being educated in one's native dialect are set to nothing in comparison with an unelaborated and unexplained assertion of the value of such varieties of speech in helping to develop knowledge of standard English. Whereas Cox urged the need to demystify standard English, the revised Order marginalises knowledge about language in relation to sociolinguistic issues. Knowledge about language use figured in the statements of attainment in the Cox curriculum but is not now considered important enough to feature in the level descriptors. Pupils may be given the opportunity to consider the development of English but it is not sufficiently valued to constitute part of the assessment framework. It seems that it is much more important that they can *use* standard English rather than understand *why* they must.

More generally, far from providing a curriculum which enables students to act in the world and address structures of inequalities, the revised English Order, which has at the least been influenced by government policies and New Right ideologies, seems largely designed to produce model citizens who will fulfil the requirements of an increasingly market-oriented economy. The shift to a curriculum which prioritises language competence through the development of core skills privileges the functional use of language for vocational purposes. Moreover, the notions of appropriateness and effectiveness which pervade the criteria for assessment serve to value certain practices and exclude others. Rather than emphasising critical and creative thought, the educational agenda has been hijacked by the economics of supply and demand so that the production of learners with key skills is the over-riding aim.

It must also be borne in mind that the very concept of progression in developing core skills across key stages is, at best, of doubtful value in both versions of the National Curriculum in English and, at worst, is possibly untenable in principle. The attempts of the Cox curriculum to show development in the ability to relate one's writing to its audience and purpose in sections 5a, 6a, 7a, 8a, 9a, and 10a (DES, 1990, pp. 13–16) highlight the problem. And yet it would still be difficult, with regard to the revised curriculum, to determine which of the following is taken from Key Stage 2 and which from Key Stages 3 and 4:

*Pupils should be given opportunities to write for specific readers, for a large, unknown readership, and for themselves.*

*Pupils should be given opportunities to write for an extended range of readers, eg the teacher, the class, other children, adults in the school or community, imagined audiences. (DfE, 1995, pp. 15 and 23)*

The difficulty arises not from incompetence on the part of the drafters but because the attempt itself is bound to fail, being based on an over-simplified, linear concept of development presupposing a uniform pattern of development in which certain skills can be identified, taught and performed at specific levels of competence. Language is really too subtle for this.

### *The cultural heritage model*

The cultural heritage model plays an extremely important role in the



revised Order, especially in relation to Key Stages 3 and 4. in spite of argument from at least two standpoints which suggest that adherence to a 'literary canon' needs to be rethought. In the first place, we live in a complex, plural society in which the voices of people of different ethnic and social backgrounds should be heard and in which women writers must play a far greater part than that allotted to them in the lists of required reading. Once again, lip-service has been paid, this time in the stipulation that 'Pupils should read texts from other cultures and traditions that represent their distinctive voices and forms, and offer varied perspectives and subject matter' (DfE, 1995, p. 19). Secondly, in spite of critical thinking which has deconstructed the notion of a literary canon to show that it is an arbitrary construct which excludes some texts and legitimises others, the revised Order states that pupils should be 'given access to significant authors and works from the English literary heritage' (ibid., p. 19). But the fact that the concept of a literary heritage is unstable is demonstrated by the very need, as the compilers of the curriculum see it, to provide lists of appropriate texts at all. Clearly, teachers cannot be trusted to make choices.

The lists of texts, moreover, demonstrate a closed, narrow view of the corpus for literary study. There are few women writers or writers of other than Anglo-Saxon origin. Twentieth-century texts should be drawn from writers with 'well established critical reputations' (DfE, 1995, p. 20); in other words reputations which have been created by dominant critical institutions, which criterion closes down the field of possible texts rather than opening it to those who have been marginalised. The lack of a broad perspective is made even clearer by the emphasis given to texts such as Greek myths and Arthurian legends, which seem to be considered as at least equal in importance to 'texts from other cultures' (ibid., p. 19).

### *Summary*

The revised Order is an exercise in rhetoric which has reworked the Cox curriculum to meet ill-informed, frequently politicised, priorities for the teaching of English. The new emphases on standard English, the literary heritage and an adult needs model of language do not provide a coherent rationale to underpin the curriculum in English. Once the ideological imperatives behind the document have been understood and critically evaluated, it remains essential that a vision of education through English be generated which will meet the needs of students in the final years of the twentieth century.

### **Towards a basis for a curriculum for English**

We argue that a cultural analysis model must lie at the heart of a coherent, meaningful curriculum for English; it should not be an offshoot, diverted as is frequently the case into 'media studies' but should function as the very core of the business of learning and teaching in English.

Cultural analysis is often criticised for having a specific political agenda and for ignoring the role of literature in personal development. This view is, however, misconceived. We do not deny that there can be personal growth through the study of literature but would argue that real personal growth goes beyond the individual exploration of thought and feeling in relation to literary texts to embrace a deepened awareness of cultural being. A study of, say, *A Streetcar Named Desire* would lead to a consideration of gender and sexuality, power and dominance as central

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features of the play. Yet an exploration of the feelings of the main characters of the play is a formative part of the analysis. By discussing issues of sexual politics and exploring notions of identity, the study would inevitably establish relationships with contemporary structures. The way that humanistic approaches narrow the field of study so that it can be dangerously limiting surfaces in one GCSE edition of the play which asks students to consider whether Stanley is Williams' vision of the 'rapacity of life force'. This undervalues the issue of rape by legitimating it as a natural appetite. Rather than denying the politics of culture we must realise that students can only begin to come to an understanding of their experiences if such issues are explicitly addressed.

Pupils at any level can be encouraged to formulate alternative interpretations of texts using new reading practices (see Peim (1993: for extensive exemplification of ways in which the practice of cultural analysis can be used on literature as well as on the material of modern culture). Interactive teaching strategies leading to active approaches to texts of all kinds should underlie classroom practices as far as possible. For educational practices to be relevant to the energies and interests of young people it is vital to give pupils a sense of agency and ownership. Rather than positioning them as consumers of knowledge and skills which the teacher transmits, they should experience the role of producers of knowledge. Only an active involvement with such practices can provide the best conditions for true learning to take place. The conceptual strategies which these approaches generate will also encourage students to become critical thinkers and not merely passive receivers of second-hand 'truths'.

It should be clear from the above that there is a pressing need to rethink the relationship between literature and media studies. Williamson and Hardman's study (1994) of the attitudes of sixty teachers of English reveal that teachers' attitudes to this relationship are characterised by unease and ambivalence. Although many agreed that popular forms of culture deserve to be studied and that all cultural experiences should be valued rather than simply placed on a scale of values, many also saw media studies as a way of reinforcing the value of great literature and judging the mass media. The desire to separate literature from the media surfaces again as a significant majority (58 per cent against 13 per cent espousing the opposing view) did not wish to see English as part of a subject like 'cultural studies that would make it possible to think about books and television programmes, film and newspapers as part of a totality' (Williamson and Hardman, 1994, p. 236).

The aim of studying the media is not to reveal differences between literary and non-literary texts, creating a false polarity in which media texts are of lower status, but to provide a climate in which pupils' own cultural baggage can be valued and explored critically. To achieve this aim it will be necessary to develop new methodologies for the investigation of the status of different media and of products within those media, to develop an understanding of how cultural values arise and why some literature may be perceived as great. Rather than have a separate 'media module' which is conceived as a token gesture to popular culture, the textual field needs to be refined so that different types of text are equally valid objects of study. A satisfactory English programme must work with the experiences students bring to school to overcome the disjunction

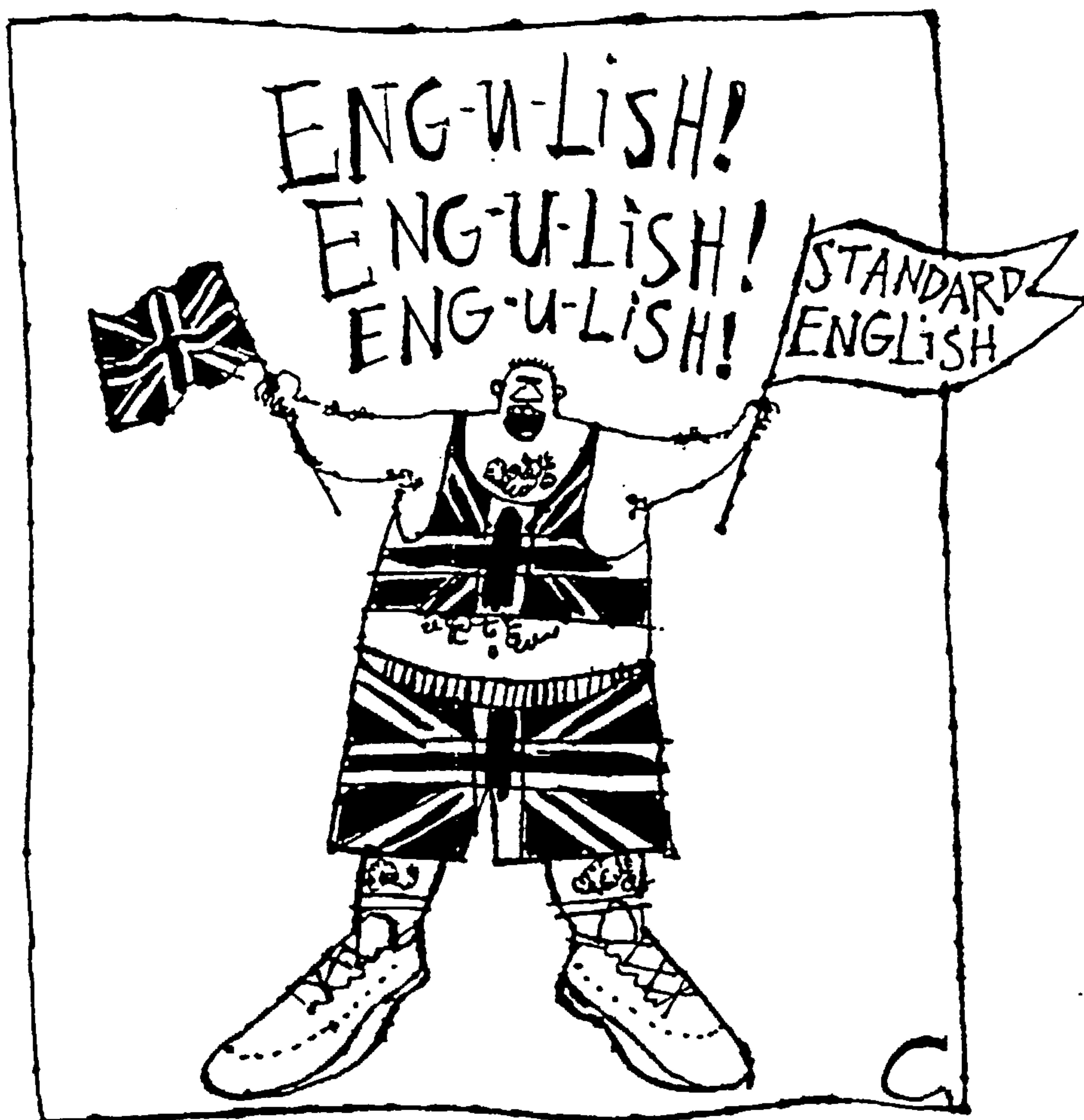


between an informal culture and the school curriculum. Only when the pupils' cultural capital is valued in school will they be able to gain an understanding of it in a broad context.

A major cause of pupil disaffection occurs because a narrow academic curriculum ignores the cultural capital students bring to school. Murphy and Torrance (1990, p. 17) cite a pertinent comment from Wilby:

*Our secondary education is organised to select those few who will go to university ... For their sake, all our children are being put through an over-blown, over-academic syllabus, in which the dominant experience for the majority is one of failure, not of achievement.*

In relation to English teaching, the language practices which traditionally define literacy actually serve to alienate and disadvantage a significant proportion of pupils, refusing to value their experience of literacy outside the classroom. Working within a curriculum which insisted on the formative assessment of what we judge to be valuable personal literacy skills, it would be possible to draw on pupils' experience to maximise their chance of achievement whilst also introducing them to a critical literacy which had real meaning for them. Many pupils have a vast knowledge, implicit and explicit, of the media and can be said to be media literate.



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The notion of critical literacy which Friere develops is central to our approach. Like him, we want to avoid a framework for education in which

*Educators are the possessors of knowledge, whereas learners are 'empty vessels' to be filled by the educators' deposits. Hence learners don't have to ask questions or offer any challenge, since their position cannot be other than to receive passively the knowledge their educators deposit. (Friere, 1985, p. 100)*

We must develop ways of reading the world as well as the word, raising debate about social and political realities and paving the way for a deeper understanding, and perhaps ultimately transformation, of the society in which we live. It is the responsibility of the English teacher specifically to raise awareness of the role that language plays in forming our vision of the world and the part that we play in it. This involves investigating a range of types of language use and relating them to the groups which use them and the purposes and effects that they have. Pupils should explore the relationships between specific belief systems and the attitudes which are derived from them, rather than simply being drilled in the production of standard English and other forms of language which are deemed appropriate for them. If they are to become fully competent language users, pupils must become aware of a range of criteria for assessing language competence and thereby see the need for, and means of, participating as critical readers and writers, speakers and listeners.

In essence, we advocate a view of the English curriculum which values all aspects of language use and considers them valid objects of study. We need to challenge fixed notions of standard English, grammar and correctness and to use more sophisticated frameworks, including sociolinguistics, to explore the nature of language and the ways in which it is used.

## **Conclusion**

It has not been our intention here to suggest that the revised National Curriculum is totally lacking in elements which we have argued are important for English. Clearly, there are gestures in the direction in which we believe English should be moving at present. But these constitute little more than drops in the ocean of the whole curriculum. It is not enough to attempt to satisfy all the demands made by divergent voices by attempting to create a portmanteau curriculum in which there is something for everyone. The opportunity to create a curriculum founded on a soundly based philosophy of English in education has been missed.

We argue, first, that there should be such an underlying rationale for what is, by any reckoning, one of the most important of school subjects and that such a rationale must be based neither in the narrow confines of the established view of English Literature nor in conservative, class-based attitudes to standard English.

The principles underlying an English syllabus for today, and tomorrow, should be rooted, as Carter (1993) has proposed, in texts and contexts in which different varieties of language – spoken and written – are compared and contrasted and in which language and literature can be integrated so that they are mutually informing and enriching and which draw on recent developments in critical, linguistic and cultural theory. Such an awareness of texts and their place in society can and should be taught so that students can identify, analyse and use different modes of language in order to progress academically and to negotiate systems of power.

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English for the Twenty-first Century: meeting  
the training needs of teachers

Frank Hardman and John Williamson

Chapter 15 of *Educational Dilemmas: Debate and Diversity Volume Four:  
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## English for the Twenty-first Century: Meeting the Training Needs of Teachers

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FRANK HARDMAN AND JOHN WILLIAMSON

In this chapter we draw on recent research evidence to argue that if English teachers are to meet the linguistic needs of pupils for the twenty-first century then there need to be significant changes to the way we train student teachers and to the English studies courses offered by universities. For the majority of postgraduate students entering English teaching an 'English' degree still largely means the study of literature; they therefore have little systematic training in English language. The domination of literary studies in the English curriculum in schools and universities has privileged literature above other forms of non-literary and media texts, and created significant gaps in knowledge about language and grammar which we think need to be filled in order to meet the new literacy demands as we move towards the twenty-first century. In order to fill the gaps created by the domination of English studies by the study of literature, we advocate a genre approach to English teaching where knowledge of the characteristics of a variety of literary, non-literary and media texts, and of their social context, should be taught.

### Knowledge about language and grammar in English in the National Curriculum

The original proposals for English in the National Curriculum for England and Wales (DES, 1989) recognized this need and placed an increased

demand on English teachers to promote a greater knowledge about language including the teaching of grammar across a range of literary, non-literary and media texts. It also recognized the training needs of English teachers and, building on two major government reports (DES, 1975, 1988) and the advice of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) (DES, 1984), called for a systematic course of study in language to promote a higher level of awareness of the properties and functions of language on the part of teachers, particularly in their initial training and through in-service courses.

Recently, however, the debate has become highly politicized with the educational right calling for a return to 'traditional grammar teaching' and the teaching of the literary canon (Marenbon, 1987) reflecting a similar debate in the USA (see Massaro, 1993). The political influence of the educational right has been felt in proposals for revising the English Order (DFE, 1993) with more emphasis on the need to teach standard spoken and written English and the rules of standard English grammar to all pupils, and the prescribing of a canon of English literature. Such political interference has been strongly resisted by English teachers and by the chair of the English Working Party which drew up the English curriculum (Cox, 1992). The educational right's 'parts of speech' approach, however, is a very narrow view of the linguistic competence we are advocating and any return to the arid and decontextualized exercises of the past would, we argue, be positively harmful. The proposals have, however, undergone three subsequent revisions following periods of consultation (NCC, 1993;

SCAA, 1994a, 1994b) and while the revised English Order more closely reflects the original Cox curriculum (DES, 1989), there is still considerable emphasis on the teaching of explicit grammatical knowledge and the English literary heritage.

In calling for knowledge about language and grammar to be given a significant place in the training of teachers and in the school English curriculum, we are not, however, calling for a return to a narrow, prescriptive approach to grammar as advocated by the radical right: the study of language and grammar in contemporary society needs to look at how language functions in social and cultural life; 'old-fashioned grammar' concerned with the study of low-level structural patterns in isolation will have only partial answers to questions about what language consists of, what it is. Nor do we see a demise in the importance of literature in the teaching of English but a widening of the range of texts studied in the classroom.

### Teachers' and pupils' knowledge about language

It seems clear that if teachers are to deliver a language curriculum as discussed above, there are major implications for the training of teachers and for universities offering 'English' degrees, to which we will return. As Kingman (DES, 1988) reports, most English teachers have degrees in literature and therefore have no systematic training in English language at all, and despite the changing nature of English studies at university, as our own research with postgraduate student teachers suggests (Hardman and Williamson, 1993), those entering teaching continue to have little structured knowledge of language. Empirical evidence from the classroom suggests this is resulting in significant gaps in teachers' subject knowledge, which is affecting their ability to teach the National Curriculum for English and develop the linguistic abilities of their pupils.

Hudson (1992) argues that students now undergoing teacher training are, in the main, from a 'post-traditional grammar' era: he suggests that

Britain is now a country without explicit grammatical knowledge due to the rejection of old-style grammar teaching as taught prior to the 1960s, characterized by parsing and decontextualized drills and exercises so that pupils had to learn parts of speech by heart and be tested on their ability to identify and label grammatical forms as a set of discrete items. In rejecting the old-style grammar, however, Hudson (1992, p. 4) feels that it is 'a clear case of an important baby being thrown out with some rather dirty bathwater' so that we have a generation of students training to be teachers who know very little about the structure of their own language.

Three recent studies of the subject knowledge base about language among primary student teachers (Chandler, *et al.* 1988; Wray, 1993; Williamson and Hardman, 1995) suggest that while there is a higher level of grammatical knowledge than some critics might have us suppose, there are gaps in their knowledge which have important implications for their effectiveness as teachers and their ability to teach and assess pupils across the primary age range for English in the National Curriculum. A study carried out with 23 postgraduate certificate in education (PGCE) students on a secondary English course (which was a pilot for our larger survey of primary students, a quarter of whom had studied English to degree level) showed that while these 'specialists' were considerably more successful at identifying parts of speech than their primary counterparts, fewer than half managed to identify either of two clauses (one subordinate, the other co-ordinate) or a phrase, the last being identified by fewer than one respondent in five.

When asked to define parts of speech, the English student teachers, like their primary colleagues, seemed to rely heavily on rather unsophisticated notional definitions probably gleaned from their own primary schooldays. So, for example, the noun was characterized as naming persons, places or things with only one student considering the possibility of abstract nouns; references to characteristic patterning with articles, to the functions of subject and object and to the proper/common distinction were made by only one student in each case. In the section asking the stu-



dent teachers to analyse children's writing for grammatical successes and errors, both primary and secondary trainee teachers had enough grammatical knowledge to identify superficial features but they were lacking a deeper understanding of the process of grammatical development in children's writing, and of the relationship between speech and writing and between standard English and non-standard dialects. This knowledge is necessary if teachers are to play their full part in helping pupils develop as writers.

The findings of our study also seem to be replicated among English teachers in schools. Evidence from HMI (DES, 1990, p. 3–4) on language awareness courses in schools, for example, suggests many courses are 'poorly structured': 'a series of one-off lessons' with 'brief or episodic contact with concepts', and 'disjointed and superficial activities' which leave little trace in pupils' understanding resulting in a 'fragmented experience' with 'limited progression'. Courses in knowledge about language also showed weaknesses where they lacked a systematic base which the teachers could make explicit. Similarly a recent survey by HMI (OFSTED, 1993) on the fourth year of the implementation of English in the National Curriculum also found weaknesses in teachers' understanding and expertise in the teaching of knowledge about language across all key stages with pupils not being provided with explicit and comprehensive teaching about language structure and functions. In many secondary schools it 'consisted of little more than desultory discussion about accents and dialects' and where examples of good work were found it was 'usually instigated by teachers who themselves had sound linguistic knowledge' (p. 9).

Recent research (SCAA, 1994c) into teachers' knowledge about language for teaching English at Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 of the National Curriculum for England and Wales (i.e. by the ages of 7, 11 and 14 years) also revealed a degree of uncertainty about what is meant by knowledge about language (KAL), particularly in Key Stages 1 and 2 and at Key Stage 3, where many teachers expressed a lack of confidence about teaching theoretical aspects of language, saying they lacked the necessary expertise. Further evidence for this is provided by a

small-scale survey of our own in which half of a convenience sample of 30 teachers who voluntarily completed a questionnaire on KAL expressed reservations about having the necessary expertise for teaching in this field of study. Given the nature of our sample, it seems highly likely that this underrepresents the scale of the shortfall in teachers who are equipped for work in an area which is, or should be, seen as a central concern of English teaching.

Research from Southampton University (Mitchell *et al.* 1994) into knowledge about language also found confusion over its meaning and a fragmented and episodic approach to such work so that its full potential contribution to pupils' development as language users was not being realized. Differences emerged in the teaching of KAL between modern foreign languages teachers and English teachers. The foreign languages teachers focused on structural aspects of written language at the sentence level or below, while in the English classroom, attention was focused on the level of the whole text, and on the distinctive characteristics of language genres, literary and non-literary, although this was at a general level and detailed language analysis was not regularly undertaken. And, while pupils could identify genre types, they were generally unable to explain in any technical way distinctive features of texts. The report concludes that the limits to teachers' own linguistic knowledge were a constraint on the development of maximally effective KAL work.

### The domination of literary studies in English

Apart from the rejection of the teaching of traditional grammar in the 1960s, we would argue that the most significant factor contributing to the low state of knowledge about language and grammar in the teaching profession and society at large has been the domination of literary studies in the teaching of English at university and in schools. Its influence can be seen in the initial criticism of the Cox report which focused on the status of literary



study in the National Curriculum. It was claimed (e.g. Knight, 1989; Hayden, 1990; Preen, 1990; Dodsworth, 1991) that literature teaching was being undermined with the new emphasis on language (which significantly for the critics featured in four chapters of the report compared to one chapter on literature), and that the traditional role of imaginative literature as the heart of English was being displaced by language. The subsequent work of the Language in the National Curriculum project (LINC, n.d.; Carter, 1990), set up to train teachers in the language requirements of English in the National Curriculum, was also criticized by Knight (1991) because of its sociolinguistic and instrumentalist approach and overemphasis on the functional aspects of language at the expense of the personal and imaginative; a view which he sums up in the following paragraph:

What children need is teachers who know that the way we use language is intimately a matter of thought, feeling and value and our response to it is necessarily a matter of judgement. That is the kind of knowledge that comes, *par excellence*, through literature; not of course a *body* of knowledge, more a form of awareness and sensibility making for civilised literacy. (p. 14)

Knight goes on to discuss the moral and spiritual values that children acquire from experiencing English literature which is 'the native language at its best' and restate the individual, romantic and liberal views normally associated with the teaching of literature. Such a civilizing and humanizing view of English teaching, which Cox described as a cultural heritage model, has its roots in a tradition of literary criticism which goes back to Coleridge, Matthew Arnold and the *Newbolt Report* of 1921. The report proposed a liberal education with English literature at its centre which, it was believed, would civilize and humanize the great mass of the population. In the 1930s this view became associated with the Cambridge critic F. R. Leavis who promoted the view that literature, especially poetry, deserved serious and thoughtful consideration because it reveals truths about the world and about language's relationship to the world; a view that was dominant in both higher and secondary education English studies in Britain for half a century. And in protecting the

nation's culture children would need protecting from the corrupting influence of the mass media by being exposed to the best literature, a position originally put forward by Leavis and Thompson (1933) and whose high moral purpose still finds echoes in the contemporary debate about English in school (Pirrie, 1993).

Firth (1990) in discussing the reaction of university English departments to the Cox Report (DES, 1989) suggests that up to the 1960s there was always a close relationship between the study of English literature in universities and the teaching of English in schools because of its civilizing mission and sense of a 'common culture' which spread through the educational system downwards. In practical terms this meant that the teaching of English in universities was very important in the training of teachers as many English graduates went into teaching, and until recently there was relatively little difference between university and sixth-form English teachers in terms of both pedagogical practice and status. Similarly there was relatively little difference between what was studied at school and university as the same texts were selected from a shared canon with similar terms and methods of textual analysis applied to them. Indeed Scott (1990), who argues for a reform of A-level English teaching (i.e. post-16 English teaching usually examined at 18 years of age) to incorporate a wider definition of texts, suggests that A-level literature teaching is the last bastion of Leavisite values, or belief in the civilizing influence of English studies, passed on down from the universities and enshrined in the A-level assessment system.

This sense of a shared purpose and status started, however, to break down, according to Firth, in the 1960s because of the 'over-academicization' of the university. English studies saw the development of a variety of literary specialisms and a turning away from criticism in Leavisite terms, where the study of literature was an exercise in value judgement. This culminated, in the 1980s, in the emergence of self-conscious 'literary theorists' and the introduction of a whole plethora of critical and theoretical approaches to literature (e.g. structuralism, linguistics, semiotics, sociology, Marxism, feminism, and post-



structuralism). And in the same period, largely as a result of the Chomskyan revolution, linguistics moved from being an esoteric and highly specialist area of study to one which seemed to offer insights into a whole range of fields of intellectual endeavour. The study of language began to offer new insights not only into language itself but into the understanding of the human mind and human society. It also began to impinge on the study of literature itself, directly through the concept of stylistics and indirectly through the role of linguistics as one major source of the structuralist movement. Such developments led to the questioning of English as a subject (Doyle, 1989) and what can or cannot be counted as 'English', and the growth of communication departments, particularly in the 'new' universities. There was also a significant reconsideration of what constitutes a text, moving beyond the pure study of literary texts, so that 'English' has been reconstituted as a cultural or social semiotic study.

In schools, however, Leavisite values, which perpetuate the domination of a narrow view of literary studies and hamper the acceptance of language studies as being a central feature of the English curriculum, remain influential. For example, a survey carried out by Davies (1989) into 40 English departments in one local education authority found that Leavisite formulations about the teaching of literature are still extremely common in statements about subject philosophy, and this is supported by our recent survey of policy statements accompanying job descriptions from 50 departments around the country. However, although Leavisite values continue to influence teachers' thinking, alternative perceptions of the subject, particularly in the study of popular culture, the media and in the study of literature, are also apparent (Goodwyn, 1992; Williamson and Hardman, 1994). Like Goodwyn we found teachers recognize and broadly support the five 'models' of English posited by the Cox report (personal growth, cross-curricular, adult needs, cultural heritage, cultural analysis) which according to critics (e.g. Davies, 1989; Jones, 1992; Stables, 1992) represent a variety of conflicting theoretical and ideological positions. Cox (1991), however, claims that they achieve a liberal consensus be-

cause they acknowledge the utilitarian function of English teaching while placing the models in a wider cultural and imaginative framework. The teachers in both surveys seem to agree with Cox by drawing pragmatically on useful ideas and ignoring theoretical complications. The greatest support, however, was given to the personal growth and cultural analysis models in which personal response to, and critical analysis of, a wide range of literary, media and non-media texts are seen as essential to ensure the personal growth of the pupil.

In both surveys there was little support for a cultural heritage view of English teaching which restricted teachers' and pupils' choice of literature to a narrow range of texts which made up a traditional canon of English literature. Such cultural stability, much favoured by the educational right, was felt to be inappropriate in a rapidly changing world and the idea of a broad reading curriculum which included women, Black and working-class writers was strongly supported. Support for a text-based approach which went beyond traditional literary forms to embrace a full range of media, literary and non-literary texts was clear. The studies also revealed the growing influence on teachers' thinking of media education, a major element of the cultural analysis view of English teaching with its emphasis on the role of English in helping children towards a critical understanding of the world and cultural environment in which they live. There was a great deal of support for a critical approach to the way media texts are constructed to develop pupils' critical awareness, but one which would develop some form of evaluation and judgement in pupils' responses to literary and non-literary texts to promote discrimination but not resistance to the media. Here we also see the continuing influence of the personal development model with its emphasis on the relationship between language and learning in the individual child, and the role of literature in developing children's imaginative and aesthetic lives. Indeed much of the media work surveyed in our research centred on the study of literary texts, as the study of literature and media education were seen as complementary rather than mutually exclusive.

Critical approaches to language and text, designed to develop in pupils an understanding that texts are open to different interpretations, were also strongly supported. Similarly teachers agreed that English should be concerned with language as it is used, taking in all kinds of text, thus reflecting the sociolinguistic influence of the LINC project on knowledge about language. While supporting this critical approach to texts, the teachers were also aware of the need for further training in analysing a broader range of texts which their literary training had not given them.

Despite this perceived need on the part of teachers for further training, the sociolinguistic perspective, which underpinned the approach of the LINC project, and which was subsequently suppressed by the Government, is viewed as inimical to the perspective that emphasizes literature as the most desirable context for exploring the uses and possibilities of language. For example Pirrie (1994, p.106) criticizes the 'multi-genre approach' approach of English in the National Curriculum and claims 'literature inculcates such consciousness of language that the power to reflect transfers readily and easily to other genres practised within other disciplines'. Critics of a language approach (e.g. Barry, 1990; Preen, 1990) also point to the lack of evidence for the effectiveness of grammar teaching, particularly in improving students' writing ability, although the research evidence for this assumption has recently been called into question (Tomlinson, 1994). Such views, however, will merely perpetuate gaps in English teachers' and students' knowledge about language and grammar as discussed above. What is needed, we argue, is a broad approach to the study and analysis of texts which draws on the study of grammar as discussed in the next section.

## **A multi-genre approach**

Advocates of a genre approach to English teaching (e.g. Carter, 1993; Kress and Knapp, 1992; Stubbs, 1990) suggest that knowledge of the characteristics of texts and of their social place can and should be

taught so that students can identify, analyse and use different genres in order to acquire the intellectual and linguistic resources to progress academically and to negotiate systems of power. This would entail a detailed knowledge of how language works; in the words of Kress and Knapp (1992, p.5) 'a knowledge of grammar as a means of gaining a full understanding of the range of things which it is possible to mean, to say, to write in a particular culture, and to do with its language'. The emphasis therefore is on meaning and function, on what language is doing and being made to do by people in specific situations in order to make particular meanings. In this social theory of language, the most important unit is the text that is a socially and contextually complete unit of language, rather than parts of speech and the rules governing their form and combination or the structure of the sentence. It is also an approach that should be on the language agenda of all subjects and part of every teacher's training because of the range of texts that are studied across different areas of the curriculum.

Similarly Stubbs (1990) argues that an understanding of grammar helps people to understand how meanings are expressed by being able to interpret language in use and the points of view from which language is produced. In what he calls critical linguistics, grammar is used as a tool of analysis so that patterns of discourse which contribute to the meanings of texts are made explicit so that points of view or ideologies can be explored. In other words, he is advocating access to power through textual analysis, as meanings are expressed in grammar and people need to understand how points of view are constructed through the selection and omission of particular grammatical options or rhetorical devices; and they require abstract descriptive categories to state them so study of grammar is essential in order to identify and talk about such meanings.

In discussing what a multi-genre approach to English will look like, Carter (1993, p.13) proposes that the study of modern English language should be rooted in texts and contexts in which different varieties of language, spoken and written, are compared and contrasted and in which language and literature can be integrated so they are mutually



informing and enriching, and which draw on recent developments in critical and cultural theory. In addition to highly valued canonical texts it would also include examples of 'popular fiction, insurance literature, advertisements and political speeches as well as media texts such as television soap opera and radio comedy programmes' so that literary texts would be seen as continuous with all other kinds of texts. By ensuring the study of modern English language is principled and systematic, the curriculum would 'enable students increasingly to see through language'.

## Implications

It seems clear that if teachers are to deliver a language curriculum as discussed above, there are major implications for the training of teachers and for universities offering 'English' degrees. As Firth (1990) suggests, changes in the school curriculum will have a direct effect on university teaching practice: the teaching of language is likely to become a necessary part of the English curriculum not only in terms of its history or particular textual qualities, but also as an object of linguistic, rhetorical and grammatical theory across a range of literary, media and non-literary texts. The growth in the popularity of A-level English language and communications studies and the study of non-literary and media texts, and their growing acceptance by universities as an entry qualification to an English studies degree, should also contribute to the changes in the profile and expectations of students seeking admission to such courses.

Initial training and in-service courses will need to address the gaps in teachers' knowledge identified in recent studies discussed above, particularly for those who follow an entirely literature-orientated training in higher education. In calling for a shift in emphasis from the domination of English studies by the teaching of literature, we are not advocating, nor do we foresee, the demise of the study of literature. Literature will continue to play a central part in English studies, as West (1994) suggests, approached from a variety of criti-

cal perspectives, and the systematic study of the English language will make a significant contribution to its study.

In suggesting a greater emphasis on the teaching of language and grammar in the training of teachers and the English school curriculum, there is a need to develop new pedagogic practices which, as Carter (1990) argues, avoid the worst excesses of formalism but are systematically organized. The Language in the National Curriculum (LINC, n.d.) project which cost £21 million, but which was suppressed by the Government because of its sociolinguistic perspective, started to develop such approaches which were activity-based, investigative in nature and which placed the study of language in its wider social and cultural context. Its influence can still be seen in recent publications on the teaching of grammar (see, for example, Hudson, 1992; Shepherd, 1993) and in the teaching of A-level language which is also influencing the work of teachers lower down in the secondary curriculum. It could still provide, or suggest, a framework for language study which would be both meaningful and structured.

Language studies and media education are crucial for a modern English curriculum: giving teachers and their students the tools to analyse and understand the manipulation of language and to demand quality products from the media that will inform, delight and move, is a challenge for the end of this century and essential for the twenty-first century.

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**Student Teachers and Models of English**

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# Student Teachers and Models of English

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**ABSTRACT** *The introductory section of the Cox Report, which formed the basis of the National Curriculum for English in England and Wales, posits five models for the teaching of English which it claims give a broad approach to the subject. Critics, however, suggest there is an unresolved conflict between the subject philosophies of the models represented in the report which might be perceived more sharply by those entering teaching. This paper explores the views of 23 English graduates in the early stages of a postgraduate training course to discover how they conceptualise the subject in the light of Cox's models as they make the transition from higher education to secondary school English teaching. An open-ended questionnaire together with an attitude questionnaire taken from a study of English teachers are used. The findings suggest that the student teachers, like the English teachers, recognise and broadly support all five models; differences do emerge, however, over the degree of support for the cultural analysis and adult needs models.*

## INTRODUCTION

In discussing the aims of English teaching, the Cox Report (DES, 1989) attempted to define the role of English in the curriculum in order for it to take its place as a core element in the National Curriculum for England and Wales. It represents the most recent attempt to define the subject in a series of reports from government committees and inspectors (HMI) (Bullock, 1975; *English From 5 to 16*: DES, 1984; Kingman, 1988). Drawing on the literature of the history of English teaching in England, it outlined five different views of the subject which it claimed are "not sharply distinguishable and certainly not exclusive". Cox (1991) also claimed that they give a broad approach to the curriculum which can unite the profession as they acknowledge the utilitarian functions of English teaching, and yet place them in a wider cultural and imaginative framework. The Cox Report (paragraphs 2.20–2.27) listed them as follows.

A 'personal growth' view focuses on the child: it emphasises the relationship between language and learning in the individual child, and the role of literature in developing children's imaginative and aesthetic lives.

A 'cross-curricular' view focuses on the school: it emphasises that all teachers have a responsibility to help children with the language demands of different subjects on the school curriculum. . .

An 'adult needs' view focuses on communication outside the school: it



emphasises the responsibility of English teachers to prepare children for the language demands of adult life, including the workplace, in a fast changing world. . .

A 'cultural heritage' view emphasises the responsibility of schools to lead children to an appreciation of those works of literature that have been widely regarded as amongst the finest in the language.

A 'cultural analysis' view emphasises the role of English in helping children towards a critical understanding of the world and cultural environment in which they live. Children should know about the processes by which meanings are conveyed, and about the ways in which print and other media carry values.

However, far from reconciling the five models, and achieving a liberal consensus, the inclusion of the cultural analysis model has, according to critics (e.g. Davies, 1989; Jones, 1992; Snow, 1991), drawn attention to the conflicts within the subject. Davies (1989) suggests that while four out of five views of English offered in the report do not seem to present the prospect of any major philosophical conflict, the cultural heritage and cultural analysis models must be seen as two alternative views of the subject despite Cox's claim that they are not mutually exclusive. Davies (1991) later argues that Cox's formulation of the two models reflects the growing polarisation of views during the 1980s, both in higher education and secondary education, about what should be the concerns and content of English studies. Doyle (1989) discusses the debate in higher education over the identity of English as a subject and how it has seen the introduction of a whole plethora of critical and theoretical approaches to literature through a massive importation into academic English studies of theories and methods otherwise associated with structuralism, linguistics, semiotics, sociology, marxism, feminism, and post-structuralism. The growth of communication departments, particularly in the 'new' universities (formerly polytechnics), has also led to a significant reconsideration of what constitutes a text, moving beyond the traditional study of literary texts, so that 'English' has been reconstituted as a cultural or social semiotic study.

## A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Throughout its history as a school and university subject there have always been tensions and contradictions within English (Goodson & Medway, 1990; Mathieson, 1991). Indeed the term itself is ambiguous, as English can include the study of the language, literature or culture. Therefore, none of the contemporary debate is new, the justification for the place of English in the curriculum having always rested upon different priorities at different stages in its history. In Britain, the 1921 Newbolt Report, set up in response to government concern about the high level of illiteracy revealed by conscripts during World War I, emphasised literary values in order to make available to all the civilising, humanising literary values of the public school (in the UK, private schools for the privileged). In this way a 'liberal education' would be a feature of all schools, at the heart of which was to be the nation's greatest



literature. Prior to Newbolt, the English curriculum in state schools had been made up of Standard English and grammatical correctness, emphasising an instrumental or utilitarian approach. Throughout the history of English teaching in England, the literary/creative and the linguistic/vocational have remained the two main themes of the debate. The recent call for a revision of English in the National Curriculum suggests that the narrow language/linguistic competence view of English, often associated with vocationalism and training, is once again on the government's agenda.

In her discussion of developments since the 1970s, Mathieson (1991) suggests that government reports (Bullock, *English From 5-16*, Kingman, Cox) have emphasised the development of pupils' linguistic competence and moved English teachers in a linguistic direction, but away from the fixed notions of Standard English and grammatical correctness which the government is seeking to reinstate in our schools. This was reflected in the development of the personal and social growth model, an approach fully endorsed by the Bullock Report, with its broader approach to language, shifting attention towards ways of supporting young people in the development of language skills for use in their own personal growth and their own learning. Until the late 1960s, the literary model had remained unchallenged and was supported by students of the influential Cambridge literary critic, F. R. Leavis, such as David Holbrook, who taught English in schools. Since the Newbolt Report, however, it had been developed and modified to include folk culture and children's artistic self-expression as a means of personal growth, so that out of the cultural heritage model grew the literary-creative or personal growth model.

However, during the 1980s, these models were being criticised from two directions—political and intellectual. There was concern over standards of literacy, and the new academic disciplines were questioning the intellectual and philosophical values of Leavisite literary criticism: its traditional notions of textual unity, organic wholeness and belief in literature as morally educative. Recent innovations in the study of language, where language is viewed as a meaning making system and where all texts are worthy of analysis, were also being joined by the study of popular culture and the media, and by new theoretical approaches to the study of literature. These elements go to make up Cox's cultural analysis model which, according to critics, is incapable of sustaining many of the subject values characteristically expressed within a cultural heritage/personal growth philosophy.

## OUTLINE OF THE STUDY

Since the Cox Report (DES, 1989), little empirical work has been carried out to validate the models in terms of the beliefs and opinions of working teachers, or to investigate the extent to which teachers' ideology influences their interpretation and application of the National Curriculum requirements in their schools. Little is known about the extent to which the struggle between subject philosophies has begun to make some impact on secondary English teaching, and how divisions in beliefs about the subject, reflected in government reports and at higher education level, affect classroom practice. Recently, Davies (1992) and Goodwyn (1992a) have



started to investigate English teachers' ideology about their subject in the light of the National Curriculum models, and the growing relationship between changes occurring in English, both in higher and secondary education.

Given the inherent contradictions which critics argue are discernible in Cox's models, and the fact that many students will have already been debating the conflicting subject philosophies at university, we were very interested in the question of whether the models pose a problem for student teachers making the transition from being students of English as an academic discipline in higher education to training to be teachers of English in secondary schools. We were also interested to discover their views on the subject philosophies posited by Cox, at an early stage in the course, to see if any changes were discernable throughout the course of the year. One of the aims of our course is to explore the different philosophies of English so that students can evaluate their own positions, and the positions of the teachers with whom they work in school, in order to look at their implications for classroom practice. Discussion of the models is therefore very important to student teachers, as is a knowledge of the subject ideologies they bring from their university courses.

In order to investigate the views of English graduates on a university postgraduate certificate in education course (PGCE), a two-part attitude questionnaire devised by Goodwyn (1992a) was given, from which comparisons could be drawn with teachers in the original survey. The students were also given a more open-ended questionnaire to complete, allowing for a more expansive response, in which they were asked to give their views on each of the models, discussing whether they thought they were relevant and fully inclusive.

## STUDENTS' ACADEMIC BACKGROUND IN ENGLISH

All 23 students who took part in this study had followed courses which included some study of the 'literary canon' which forms the underlying basis of the cultural heritage model. In addition, ten had followed literature courses which looked beyond the traditional English literature corpus and had studied women writers, black writers, American literature, or comparative literature. An overlapping group of ten had followed courses explicitly concerned with literary theory, although we cannot exclude the possibility that literary theory was a subcomponent of literature courses followed by other students. Six students had followed courses concerned with various aspects of media studies and five courses of a broad cultural nature. Finally, 14 of the students had followed courses in language or linguistics.

## ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

Goodwyn's (1992a) questionnaire was applied to the 23 students on our PGCE course to compare their views with those of the teachers studied by Goodwyn concerning the Cox models and their influences on classroom practice. It is in two parts: the first section asked respondents to rank order the models (Table I), the second part asked them to respond to 20 individual questions (Table II).

Table I shows results of the first part of the questionnaire concerning the

relative importance accorded to each of the five English models by the English teachers in Goodwyn's survey and the student English teachers in terms of their personal priorities and how they perceived their influence in the classroom. In each case the figures given are the total for each model divided by the number of respondents.

TABLE I

<u>Personal priorities</u>	
<i>Teachers</i>	<i>Students</i>
1.43 Personal growth	1.28 Personal growth
2.50 Cultural analysis	2.50 Cultural analysis
3.50 Cross-curricular	3.31 Adult needs
3.70 Adults needs	4.00 Cross-curricular
3.70 Cultural heritage	4.50 Cultural heritage
<u>Current influence</u>	
<i>Teachers</i>	<i>Students</i>
2.10 Personal growth	2.95 Personal growth
2.50 Cross-curricula	3.00 Cultural analysis
3.30 Cultural analysis	3.00 Adult needs
3.50 Cultural heritage	3.04 Cross-curricular
3.60 Adult needs	3.70 Cultural heritage

The percentages of teachers and students supporting and disagreeing with the 20 statements from the second part of the questionnaire have been given in Table II; neutral responses have not been recorded except when they are particularly significant. Where Goodwyn has not given a complete breakdown of his figures, a question mark has been used.

The rank ordering of personal priorities and perceived influence of the models on classroom practice by both teachers and students shows that personal growth is perceived as being the most important model and thought to be the most influential in the classroom. Similarly, cultural analysis is seen as the second most important personal priority by both teachers and students. For the teachers, however, cultural analysis is not considered very influential on practice in a general way whereas the students think it is very important in the classroom, alongside adult needs. Differences emerge over the adult needs model, with the teachers placing it last on their list of personal priorities and last as a current influence on English teaching. Their rejection of the adult needs model is also reflected in their response to statement 15 concerning the importance of preparing 16-year-olds for the world of work, over and above following a 2-year course preparing for an advanced level qualification in English (A-level); over 70% of the teachers rejected this idea; in the case of the students only 43% felt that it was important to place more emphasis on preparing pupils for A-level than for work. Clearly the adult needs model has much more importance in the student's thinking and is not seen in opposition to the personal growth model. In the case of the teachers, Goodwyn suggests that it reflects the



TABLE II

	% agreeing/disagreeing	
	Teachers	Students
1. English teachers should use all five models in their teaching	nearly 100	91/4
2. Media education belongs principally in English	15/25	34/34
3. English teachers should teach their pupils to resist the influence of the media	15/40	13/60
4. English teachers should teach their pupils to be more discriminating about the media	nearly 100	96/4
5. English teachers should teach pupils to resist the influence of popular culture	5/40	4/82
6. In English, the study of the media is as important as the study of literature	20/40	35/22
7. It is more important for pupils to have knowledge of a range of texts than of the conventional literary canon	80/?	73/4
8. Knowledge about language is a welcome addition to English	80/?	82/4
9. Knowledge about language builds on existing good practice in English	60/?	69/17
10. Linguistics is an increasing influence in English	20/50	47/13
11. The influence of linguistics is improving English teaching	15/?	17/21
12. Ultimately, knowledge about language is more important	25/45	13/65
13. Language across the curriculum is chiefly the responsibility of English teachers	13/70	17/52
14. All teachers of language (i.e. English, ESL, other languages) should co-operate closely	70/?	78/4
15. It is more important for pupils aged 16 to be prepared for the world of work than for studying for A-level	3/70	21/43
16. All pupils should study literature at Key Stage Four	90/?	87/4
17. The study of literature and of language should play equal parts at Key Stage Four	85/?	69/8
18. The study of literature has a civilising influence	70 (30 neutral)	26/52
19. The study of literature helps moral development	70 (30 neutral)	30/39
20. Pupils' personal response to literature is very important	98/2	96

long-standing tension in the teaching of English, discussed above, between helping pupils prepare for the functional demands of the adult world and trying to develop their literary sensibilities.

Differences also appear between the students and the teachers in their attitudes to the culture heritage model. Both in terms of their personal priorities and current influence on the teaching of English, the students rank cultural heritage last. Similarly, in response to the statements reflecting the influence of the cultural heritage model on the teaching of English (18 and 19), only 26% agreed with the statement that literature has a civilising influence and 30% agreed with the view that

it helps moral development. This contrasts with the 70% agreement by the teachers to both statements, showing that the cultural heritage model is still influential.

The students' responses to the statements about media education (statements 2–6) also show some interesting differences and suggest a stronger support for the cultural analysis model where media education has been very influential. While only 34% of the students agreed that media education belongs in English for statement 2, with 32% remaining neutral (compared with 15% of the teachers agreeing and 60% remaining neutral), 60% disagreed with the statement that English teachers should teach their pupils to resist the influence of the media (statement 3); this compares with only 40% of the teachers disagreeing with this statement. In response to the statement that English teachers should teach pupils to resist the influence of popular culture (statement 5), over 82% of the students disagreed with the statement compared with only 40% of the teachers. When asked if the study of the media is as important as the study of literature (statement 6), most of the students, 43%, remained neutral, 35% agreed and 22% were against. This compares with 40% of the teachers remaining neutral, 20% agreeing and 40% disagreeing. Both teachers and students were almost unanimous in their support of pupils becoming more discriminating about the media, but in the case of the students it seems there is stronger support for the role that media education can play in this process.

Differences also appeared in response to the cluster of statements relating to the role of linguistics in the teaching of English (8 to 12): over 50% of English teachers said that linguistics was not an increasing influence on English (statement 10), with only 20% agreeing that it was. In the case of the students, 47% thought it was an increasing influence, 13% disagreed and 39% were undecided. There was less certainty amongst the students, however, that linguistics was improving English teaching (statement 11): only 17% of the students agreed, compared with 11% of teachers, and most remained neutral. Goodwyn suggests that the perceived lack of the influence of linguistics may be due to the fact that they fail to see knowledge about language as linguistics. Both students and teachers were enthusiastic about knowledge about language, however, with over 80% from each survey agreeing that it is a welcome addition to English (statement 8). Goodwyn suggests that this is evidence of the increasing importance of the cultural analysis model, as the analytical approaches being developed through knowledge about language are also necessary for dealing with media texts.

In both surveys, literature continues to dominate. In fact the majority of student teachers thought knowledge about literature was more important than knowledge about language: 65% disagreed with statement 12 that knowledge about language is more important than knowledge about literature compared with 45% of the English teachers; only 13% of the students thought that it was more important compared with 25% of teachers. Like the teachers in Goodwyn's survey, literary texts feature strongly in the students' views on English teaching but they are not confined to the narrow range of texts of the cultural heritage model. Both students and teachers strongly support statement 7 stating that it is more important to have knowledge of a range of texts than of the conventional literary canon. Similarly, there is a high degree of support, by both students and teachers, for the study of literature in the



final two years of compulsory schooling (Key Stage 4) between the ages of 14–16 years (statement 16), although this is balanced by support being given to statement 17 on the study of language and literature playing equal parts at Key Stage 4. Goodwyn suggests that this reflects support for the personal growth model which fosters a balance between language and literature at all stages of the curriculum. Support for the personal growth model is also reflected in the almost unanimous agreement to the final statement concerning the importance of pupils' response to literature by both teachers and students.

In response to the statements concerning the cross-curricular model (13 and 14) there seems to be broad agreement that cross-curricular English is not solely the responsibility of the English teacher; nor did the cross-curricular model rank highly in either the students' or teachers' personal priorities, although it is seen as quite a strong influence in the classroom by the English teachers.

## OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONNAIRE

As well as collecting quantitative data on the students' responses to the models, an open ended questionnaire was also used to collect more qualitative data requiring the students to respond in turn to each of the five models defined by Cox and discussing their relevance to the teaching of English. One student was absent at this stage of the study.

## PERSONAL GROWTH

None of the respondents disagreed with this as an approach to English teaching, with fifteen of the group clearly showing that they felt it represented an important aspect of the teacher's role. Indeed, nine respondents volunteered the information that this was either the most important of the five models or at least one of the most important. Several felt that literature had an important role to play, as one student put it "in providing [a] basis for [the] child's imaginative and aesthetic development". A fellow student went further, claiming "only through such learning can children grow in experience until they can form their own views and gain individuality". Nor was this seen purely as a function of the study of literature, with four of the students drawing attention to the important relationship between language and learning and the relevance of that relationship to the development of the individual.

There was a strong sense in general that personal growth is very much a central part of the business of English teaching and indeed two students explicitly commented that, in the words of one, "This is the part of teaching/studying English that brought me here".

There were, however, some comments which counterbalanced the general approbation of this model. Two students, including one of those for whom the personal growth model was a *raison d'être* for being an English teacher, felt that "to aim for this personal growth to the exclusion of other approaches and aims is to do the child a disservice". Another went further, stating that the personal growth of the child is "important but should be less of a priority than reading and writing Standard



English". Several students expressed the reservation that this model is important "if enough time can be given to each child to develop 'personal growth' ". Two of the group felt that the personal growth model was "perhaps a little ambitious in the light of class sizes of 30 or more" and that it is "a great responsibility for an English teacher to be faced with the 'personal growth' of a child". In a sense, the latter point was further developed by a respondent who wrote, "Imaginative and aesthetic lives are not the sole responsibility of the school of English. 'Personal growth' occurs at any point where interesting stimulation is offered to a mind".

To some extent, then, there were reservations but these were relatively rare and minor, the general position clearly being that two thirds of the group felt this to be an important model of English teaching, with no-one arguing against it as part of the English teacher's brief.

### CROSS-CURRICULAR

This, again, is a view of English teaching which generally found approval among the group, ten of whom suggested that they regarded it as important, although two of these were rather vague as to whether they thought that it was an important function of the English teacher or that it was important that teachers of other subjects develop their pupils' language in respect of the demands of their own curriculum areas. Of these ten respondents, one noted that this model was less important than the personal growth model, another that, although important, it was the "least significant" of the models.

Seven more of the group agreed that English teachers should concern themselves with cross-curricular language issues although three of them noted that they agreed 'only to a certain extent'.

Response to this model differed to that of the first in that three of the students felt that this issue was not part of the brief of the English teacher: "English is taught in specific lessons but language development should be taught throughout the school"; "*all* teachers have a responsibility to help children with the language demands of any subject. If there was constant help with language demands and Standard English, levels could hopefully improve and the English teacher could concentrate on using literature to develop the child's 'imaginative and aesthetic life' "; "Hopefully 'other subjects' will not put this sole responsibility on the English Dept".

In expanding on this point, the respondents seemed to look to benefits of, broadly, two kinds. The most commonly mentioned related to the development of the communication skills necessary for success in other subjects. Views expressed ranged from the very general to the specific, from a feeling that it is the English teacher's responsibility to help use language effectively, to a concern with 'correct' grammar and spelling. At intermediate points on this scale were comments to the effect that the English teacher should help children develop the range of their command of the language and understanding of its differing uses; that English is the most important subject from a cross-curricular viewpoint because it is "the instrument used to instruct, explain, question and guide the pupils"; "that skills of



reading, writing, interpretation and presentation can be developed in English for use in other lessons; that developing literacy in English will help pupils to cope with the technical language of such subjects as science and mathematics".

On a less instrumental plane, three of the respondents seemed to forge a link between the cross-curricular and the personal growth models, one arguing that without a cross-curricular perspective many pupils would "miss out on a complete education—learning reflects life"; another argued that "a good command of English enables people to expand in other areas of life, whether at school or at work or in relationships with others". The third, equally high-mindedly, claimed that "English does have responsibility to deepen the thoughts and broaden the opinions of all pupils".

Clearly, and perhaps somewhat surprisingly, even at this early stage in their training these students had detailed views on this issue which were clearly articulated and apparently firmly held. It is interesting that although the personal growth model is seen by this group as more important, the justifications for the cross-curricular model were more fully expounded in the response to this questionnaire, perhaps because the arguments for the former were seen as almost self-explanatory.

The main reservation expressed about this model, put forward by eight of the students, was that cross-curricular language work should not all be left to the English department, with two respondents also stressing the importance of inter-departmental team work. One student was also concerned about pressures of time and another, while strongly approving of the model, was adamant that "It is necessary not to detract from the intrinsic value of English as an individual subject".

There is, then, broad support for this model of English teaching, although this is held with some reservations by a number of the group who feel that, although valuable, it would not be at the top of their list of priorities and that the English teacher should not be held solely responsible for its implementation.

## ADULT NEEDS

Yet again, the consensus was favourable to this model, with 13 of the group indicating that meeting adult needs was an important part of English teaching, with five of the respondents indicating a very strong opinion in that direction; it was, in the words of one, "a basic responsibility of the English teacher to prepare children linguistically for adult life".

Five more students agreed that meeting adult needs should be an aim of English teaching, although three of them expressed reservations, two of whom saw this as less important than other aims; the third was concerned that "care must, of course, be taken so this aspect of English teaching does not turn into a guide to drafting CVs and succeeding in job interviews".

Four of the respondents seemed opposed to the adult needs model of English teaching. Two of these argued that the concept of 'adult needs' was a fake one, in that there was no real distinction between 'child needs' and 'adult needs' and that language development was not properly divisible along this dimension. Another took the view that 'adult needs' should be the province of another subject area—perhaps



personal and social education: "In this way, they can focus more directly and solely on personal development skills". Finally, one ascribed the adult needs model to the "Anglo-American neo-conservative reaction to the 'excesses' of the 1960s".

Although there was broad support for this model, some of it strongly expressed, there was a range of reservations or qualifications, some of which were put forward equally forcefully. Two students stressed that the place to learn the language of the workplace was in the workplace itself because of the varying demands of different situations. Another two respondents felt, as had been the case with the cross-curricular model, that teachers of other subjects, notably Personal and Social Education (PSE), should be involved; perhaps a corollary of this was the fear of one student that there might not be any room in "this style of teaching to appreciate the aesthetics of literature". Finally, there was a sense, expressed by three of the group, that meeting adult needs should be an inevitable outcome of a sound and balanced English curriculum, rather than an explicit goal in its own right.

The adult needs model was regarded by this group with a level of approval quite similar to that expressed for the cross-curricular model. Most approved of it, many of them seeing it as important, but even among that sub-group there were reservations and there was a minority of students who did not see meeting adult needs in the sense defined above as a proper goal of English teaching.

## CULTURAL HERITAGE

The response to this model perhaps illustrates the benefits of an open-ended questionnaire more than any of the others. Nearly as many students approved of this model as was the case with the cross-curricular and adult needs models, but more extensive reservations were expressed.

Nine of the group felt that transmitting the cultural heritage was important, but about half of that number felt the need to qualify their approbation to a significant extent. Another six students expressed a still more limited approval. More students—seven—spoke against this model than any other.

Unhappiness with this view of English teaching centred very largely on the lack of consideration it would afford to more modern writers, to women writers, to writers from ethnic minority groups and, more broadly, to non-literary texts. There was a sense that the cultural heritage model was narrow, elitist, and, as one student put it, 'pompous'. There was also an awareness that the 'canon' is a dynamic rather than a static entity and is thus at the very least open to debate. Issues of relevance to particular teaching situations, the danger of boredom and 'difficulty' of much of the canon were also raised.

Of our group of 22 students, there were only four who did not raise at least some of the points cited in the previous paragraph. For the majority, the cultural heritage model is one which has to be hedged around with qualification and is clearly seen as, at best, a very limited model of English teaching.



## CULTURAL ANALYSIS

This, along with the personal growth model, was the view which found most support among the group. Eighteen of the respondents regarded it as important, with another three suggesting it was a valuable model but not *the* most important. Only one student dissociated herself from the cultural analysis model, her entire comment being: "Although such a view could be incorporated into English lessons, couldn't it also form part of PSE lessons". Three more students agreed that this pedagogic function could be shared by teachers of personal and social education (PSE), which was as close as anyone came to making a negative point about this model except for the fear of one student that it "might downplay the importance of learning 'standard' English which will always be an invaluable skill".

Arguments in favour included the importance of understanding society and the role of the media in society, of helping pupils come to terms with their own cultural environment and moving from that, and an appreciation of popular culture, to a broader understanding of other cultures. The virtues of critical questioning, understanding, tolerance and awareness would, it was felt, be developed by this model.

## CONCLUSION

The results from the questionnaires suggest that the student teachers recognised all five models of English teaching and that there was broad support for the models. While different priorities are given to each of the models, with personal growth and cultural analysis being viewed by the students as the most important both in terms of personal priority and influence in the classroom, the findings support Cox's contention that they give a broad approach to the curriculum. This reflects Goodwyn's (1992a) survey which found that the five models are recognised by a wide range of teachers and are generally present in English departments. Nor did the models seem to present the students with any of the major philosophical or ideological difficulties critics discussed above claim have been brought about by the inclusion of the cultural analysis model in the Cox Report (DES, 1989). As with the teachers in Goodwyn's survey, the students seem to take a pragmatic view, borrowing from all five models.

It would seem that the high degree of support for the personal growth and cultural analysis models, by both students and teachers, suggests that the cultural analysis model, developed during the 1980s, is having, and will continue to have, an increasing influence in the classroom and that it is being accommodated into the personal growth model, in the same way that the personal growth model developed from the cultural heritage model. Our findings support Goodwyn's (1992b) view that media education, along with knowledge about language, is seen as providing common ground between personal growth and cultural analysis so that these models are developing into a composite of both.

The findings suggest, however, that there is a broader degree of support for the cultural analysis model amongst the student teachers: for a text-centred approach in which students engage with a full range of media, literary and non-literary texts. And

while literature is still seen as playing a central role in the teaching of English by both students and teachers, with the definition of what constitutes literature broadened beyond the 'traditional canon', for the students it is much less likely to be seen as having a civilising and moral influence, values usually associated with a Leavisite subject philosophy, developed from Leavis' (1933) writing, where English literature was seen as a bastion of cultural values in a world of change.

While both students and teachers broadly support the personal growth and cultural analysis models, significant differences did emerge over the adult needs model which appears to be an unresolved conflict for the teachers who placed it last as a personal priority and current influence on classroom practice. The student teachers show more support for meeting pupils' linguistic needs in order to function effectively in society, although it is not seen solely as the responsibility of the English teacher, as the student responses to the cross-curricular model suggest, and they rank adult needs second alongside cultural analysis in terms of its influence on the classroom. The teachers, however, show more support for developing pupils' literary sensibilities and for the values of Leavisite literary criticism in which many English teachers have been trained and which, according to Davies (1992), are still very influential in many English departments.

This study was embarked on, in large part, to attempt to ascertain whether any mismatch in the philosophies of English teaching espoused by practising teachers and those of student teachers might be likely to prove problematical for the latter. While the views of these two groups, as might be expected, are not in perfect accord, there is clearly sufficient common ground between them for us to feel confident that our students will fit harmoniously into the profession at large.

It is, perhaps, to be expected that recent graduates, reflecting the intellectual debate among literary academics over questions of literary values and the literary canon, should be less influenced by Leavisite literary values and more open to recent innovations in the teaching of English which Cox categorises as the cultural analysis model. The questionnaires, however, were conducted prior to any extensive classroom practice. As a follow-up to this study, we wish to see whether any noticeable changes occur during the course of the year, in their personal preferences and classroom priorities for the models.

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**Abridged Too Far: evidence from teachers against the case  
for revising the Cox curriculum**

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## *Abridged Too Far: evidence from teachers against the case for revising the Cox curriculum*

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**ABSTRACT** *In much of the recent debate over the teaching of English there has been a notable lack of empirical evidence on teachers' thinking and classroom practice; this has particularly been true of the National Curriculum Council's case for revising the English Order. In the absence of such information, the study set out to gather evidence of teachers' thinking and classroom practice in two fundamental areas of the English curriculum—the teaching of literature and media education—as a contribution to the debate. Sixty teachers responded to an attitude questionnaire and a sub-sample of 20 teachers filled in a survey on the teaching of media education. The findings of the study seriously question the validity of the case for revising the Cox curriculum.*

### **The Political Context**

The political context in which teachers of English are now operating has obviously changed and has a major bearing on the teaching of English: it is against this background that we consider the findings of the study. The agenda for the teaching of English has shifted from the liberal consensus envisaged in the Cox Report (DES 1989) with its five models of English teaching—personal growth, cross-curricular, adult needs, cultural heritage, cultural analysis—which Cox (1991) claims unite the profession because they acknowledge the utilitarian function of English teaching while placing the models in a wider cultural and imaginative framework. The radical right's cultural offensive, through the highly partisan appointments to the National Curriculum Council and the Schools Examination and Assessment Council, is evident in the proposed revisions to the English Order and new assessment arrangements. Their view, articulated by Marenbon (1987), that English teaching is simply a matter of grammar and great books, is now central to the government's agenda for English. Cox (1993) summed up the situation in a recent lecture

The extraordinary situation today is that this small group of sentimental dogmatists is in a position to impose its will on all teachers of English in state education—and is doing so ... The right-wingers are attacking the present curriculum because they want to restore a unity and stability based on the hegemony imposed by the upper and middle classes in the 1930s



and before. The texts they prescribe often seem more suited to the days of British imperialism.

Evidence that the broad approach put forward by Cox is being challenged and displaced by the proposed revisions to the English curriculum is reflected in the fact that the cultural heritage model, with its emphasis on the teaching of a literary canon, together with a narrow language/linguistic competence view of English, is being given dominance over the other models of English teaching. The cultural analysis model, which as various commentators suggest (e.g. Davies, 1989; Goodwyn, 1992a) has done most to challenge the cultural heritage model, is coming under attack from the educational right-wing. This can be seen in the government's suppression of the Language in the National Curriculum project (LINC) with its sociolinguistic approach to language awareness and in the recent proposals from the NCC to drop media education from English in order to reduce overload and force a return to 'basics' in the subject.

The growth of media education throughout the 1980s, along with new developments and theoretical approaches to the study of language and literature in both higher and secondary education (see Doyle, 1989; Dixon, 1991), has been very influential in bringing about the growth of the cultural analysis model in the teaching of English. It was given official recognition in 1989 with the publication of the Cox Report: media education became a central and compulsory part of the English curriculum and this was complemented by the new emphasis on developing children's knowledge about language through the close study and critical analysis of language as it is used. It brought with it new approaches to texts and embraced an understanding and critical awareness of all forms of language and media texts, thereby aiming to provide young people with tools for understanding the modern world. Our findings support the view that the cultural analysis model of English teaching is growing in importance and influence on classroom practice at a time when the radical right is trying to remove it from the National Curriculum for English because of what they see as its subversive purpose.

### **Background to the Study**

Absent from much of the debate and the government's interventionist approach to the teaching of English has been empirical evidence of teachers' thinking and classroom practice: this is certainly true of the case for the revisions to the English Curriculum. (It could, of course, be argued that the recent boycott of KS 3 English SATs provides evidence of teachers' thinking on at least one aspect of government education policy.) Recent research by Goodwyn (1992b) suggests that English teachers recognise and use all five models posited by the Cox Report, but that they do not give equal weighting to each model. He found that the personal growth model was the one which most teachers subscribed to and that the cultural analysis model was growing in importance so that these models are developing into a composite of both. The cultural heritage model, although present in a number of ways, was given a low status in terms of personal priorities and influence on classroom practice by the teachers in the survey.

As a contribution to the debate on the teaching of English, we decided to build on Goodwyn's (1992b) study and explore further the influence of the cultural analysis model of English on teachers' thinking and classroom practice in two areas that have

become central to the current debate: the teaching of literature and the place of media education in the English Curriculum. As Goodwyn (1992a) suggests, the cultural analysis model brings together the study of literature and of the media through a text-centred approach in which there is an intensive engagement with the full range of media, literary and non-literary texts. For the purpose of our study an attitude questionnaire was designed, made up of thirty statements drawn from a review of the literature on the teaching of media education and literature, together with a media education survey. It was sent out in January 1993 to teachers of English from a range of secondary schools in the north east of England. Respondents were selected on the basis of 'convenience sampling' (Cohen & Mannion, 1985), from schools in which our students were on teaching placements. Sixty teachers responded to the questionnaire and a sub-sample of twenty teachers filled in the media education survey designed to explore in more detail teachers' thinking on the teaching of media education and their classroom practice. There was, as with any voluntary response to sampling, a prospect of self-selection, especially in relation to the media survey. However, since we were interested to learn of the views of those actively engaged in this work, this is by no means a disadvantage and the variety of responses shows very clearly that respondents were by no means all specialists or enthusiasts of media education.

### The Teaching of Literature

The questionnaire (see Table I) reveals that far from abandoning the teaching of literature, as the radical right would have us believe, almost all of the teachers in the survey (statement 30) agreed that literature has an important part to play in developing pupils' sensitivity, and more than half agreed with statement 18 that it does have a civilising influence and is important in the moral development of a child. Here we see the strong influence of the personal growth model of English teaching with its emphasis on the role of literature in the development of a child; we also see it in statement 2 where the great majority of teachers agreed that the study of culture should include everyone's creative and communicative experience. The sample was, however, divided over the question of adult needs: less than half agreed with statement 17 that English should be more concerned with developing children's literary sensibilities than preparing them for the world of work, about a third disagreed and nearly as many remained neutral. English teachers still seem suspicious of a narrow, utilitarian approach to English which this statement suggests and this, together with a belief in the moral educative value of literature, reflects the continuing influence that the values of Leavisite literary criticism has over many English departments.

### Cultural Heritage

There was little support however for a cultural heritage view which restricted teachers' and pupils' choice of literature to a narrow range of texts made up of a traditional literary canon: nearly all of the teachers disagreed that the reading curriculum should be made up of a compulsory canon of literary works (statement 23) and a substantial majority disagreed that it should be made up of unquestioned masterpieces (statement 28). The idea of a broad reading curriculum was strongly supported: almost all agreed that children should develop knowledge of a range of

TABLE I. Analysis of results from attitude questionnaire

	☞ Agree/disagree
(1) English teachers should aim to bring their pupils into as much contact as possible with first rate literature so as to provide them with standards and powers of discrimination against which the offerings of the mass media will be cut down to size.	58/22
(2) The study of culture should go beyond established art forms to include everyone's creative and communicative experience.	85/3
(3) Popular forms of culture deserve curriculum space and should be analysed in the classroom alongside more traditional forms.	83/2
(4) Great literature has an important part to play in training children in traditional values.	33/35
(5) The subject 'English' should be replaced by a term like cultural studies that would make it possible to think about books and television programmes, film and newspapers as part of a totality.	13/58
(6) The teaching of English should aim to promote a cultivated understanding of the history of English literature which is inseparable from its appreciation.	35/37
(7) The mass media is a major contributor to the social and moral decline of society.	22/50
(8) We should not be concerned with putting books, plays, television and comics into a universal scale of cultural values, but with valuing how people relate to their cultural experience.	50/2
(9) By seeing all texts, whether print, audio or visual, as worthy of study, media education will fail to teach children to discriminate and appreciate great works of art.	7/85
(10) Popular culture impairs children's capacity to appreciate more valuable aspects of culture like literature and theatre.	15/77
(11) Visual literacy is as important as print literacy.	60/22
(12) In the language of literature we find the values of the past, and thence we shape the values of the present.	27/35
(13) Knowing that texts are open to different interpretations and that audiences bring meanings to a text is an essential part of learning how texts work.	98/0
(14) Media education should be at the heart of the English National Curriculum.	38/42
(15) Understanding and using audio-visual technologies ought to be taken as seriously as reading and writing verbal language.	37/38
(16) It is important that children develop knowledge of a range of texts that goes beyond the traditional literary canon.	93/3
(17) English should be concerned with developing children's literary sensibilities rather than preparing them for the world of work.	40/32
(18) Studying literature has a civilising influence and is important in the moral development of a child.	62/12
(19) Media education should aim to develop pupils' critical awareness of the way in which the media are actively involved in the process of constructing or representing 'reality' rather than transmitting or reflecting it.	82/5
(20) The traditional English canon should be central to the English curriculum.	23/47
(21) The literary canon should be seen as an artificial concept, constructed by particular people for particular reasons at a certain time.	47/23
(22) Our task in English should be to analyse discourses for their ideological content.	22/37
(23) The reading curriculum in schools should be made up of a compulsory canon of literary works.	0/92
(24) We should broaden the traditional literary canon to ensure women's writing, black writing and working class writing stand strongly along side the texts of privileged white men.	82/8
(25) Books and plays are of more value than TV programmes or comics.	38/30
(26) As literature is pushed out of the English curriculum, the general level of literacy will continue to fall.	37/32
(27) English should be concerned with the study of language as it is used, taking in all kinds of texts whether they be from literature, advertising, journalism, comics, pop music or soap operas.	88/5
(28) Works of literature studied in the classroom should be unquestioned masterpieces, for children can learn to read and enjoy literature only through knowing the best of it.	8/82
(29) Specifying a compulsory canon of great works will squeeze out of the curriculum many of the books which help young people to develop as confident, responsive and discerning readers.	93/0
(30) As teachers of English we aim to awaken the sensitivity of our pupils to human emotions.	93/5



texts beyond the traditional literary canon (statement 16), the same number thought that a compulsory canon would deprive young people of many of the books that help them to develop as confident, responsive and discerning readers (statement 29) and over three quarters of the sample thought that the traditional literary canon should be broadened to include women, black and working class writers (statement 24).

Similarly, there was little support for statements traditionally associated with a cultural heritage model. Less than a quarter of teachers agreed with statement 20 that the traditional English canon should be central to the English curriculum, with nearly half disagreeing and about a third remaining neutral, and on the question of whether great literature has a part to play in training children in traditional values (statement 4), the respondents were equally split three ways. Statement 6, on whether English should promote a cultivated understanding of the history of English literature which is necessary for its appreciation, got a mixed response with just over a third agreeing, slightly more disagreeing and rather fewer remaining neutral. Opinion was similarly divided on statement 12 on whether the literature of the past can shape the values of the present with about a quarter agreeing, just over a third disagreeing and rather more remaining neutral. On the question of whether standards of literacy will fall if literature is pushed out of the curriculum (statement 26), opinions were again mixed with just over a third agreeing, just under a third disagreeing and rather fewer remaining neutral. The ambiguity of what is meant by literature may have contributed to the uncertainty reflected in the responses to statement 26; the declining influence and rejection of the cultural heritage model, however, is reflected in the above statements, particularly of the simplistic and narrow definition of the canon which the educational right want to reimpose.

### **Popular Culture**

Support for a text-based approach is clear, but it is one which goes beyond traditional literary forms to embrace a full range of media, literary and non-literary texts. The great majority of teachers thought popular culture should be studied in the classroom alongside more traditional forms (statement 3) and nearly as many disagreed with statement 10 that such study impairs children's capacity to appreciate more 'valuable' aspects of culture such as literature and theatre. Similarly less than a quarter thought the mass media was a major contributor to the social and moral decline of society (statement 7) with half disagreeing and the remainder staying neutral. The growing influence of media education on teachers' thinking, a key element of the cultural analysis model, is also reflected in statement 19 where the great majority of the sample supported its role in developing a critical awareness of the way in which media texts are constructed, in statement 11 where most teachers thought visual literacy was as important as print literacy, and in statement 9 where a substantial majority disagreed with the statement that using media texts in the classroom would be a corrupting influence.

### **Critical Analysis**

Critical approaches to language and text, the other main strand of the cultural analysis approach to English, are also strongly supported in statement 13, which statistically produced the most significant result, where nearly all of the teachers agreed with the view that knowing that texts are open to different interpretations is

an essential part of knowing how texts work. Similarly in response to statement 27, there was very substantial agreement that English should be concerned with language as it is used, taking in all kinds of texts, thus reflecting the sociolinguistic influence on knowledge about language. It also reflects the fact that teachers frequently make use of a variety of media texts—in terms of subjects such as the language of newspapers or advertising—to teach about the varieties of language structure. While just under a half agreed that the literary canon was an ideological construct (statement 21), there was less commitment to analysing discourses for their ideological content (statement 22) with less than a quarter agreeing, more than a third disagreeing and most remaining neutral. Perhaps fears of political indoctrination which such work can evoke are evident in the responses to this statement.

Although in principle the cultural analysis model is value free, moving away from an established hierarchy of values that a literary canon will impose, teachers in the survey still wanted to develop some form of evaluation and judgement in pupils' responses to literary and media texts: in other words some form of discrimination but not resistance to the media. Not surprisingly there were some conflicting responses to this issue, perhaps reflecting the paradoxical nature of a model that aims to be value free and yet enhance and extend an individual's ability to make personal judgements through analysis and reflection: a half of the teachers thought it was wrong to have a universal scale of cultural values against which to judge literary and media products (statement 8), with just under half remaining neutral; most of the teachers saw literature as offering a yardstick against which the mass media can be judged (statement 1), and on the statement that books and plays had more value than TV programmes or comics (statement 25), opinion was fairly evenly divided, although rather more agreed than disagreed or were neutral.

### Media Education

When it came to the more general question of the place of media education in the English curriculum (statement 14), opinions were equally divided: over a third agreed that media education should be at the heart of the National Curriculum for English, rather more disagreed and a fifth remained neutral. On the question of whether the subject of English should be replaced by a term which would embrace the study of all kinds of texts beyond the study of literature, (statement 5), very few agreed, most disagreed and less than a third remained neutral. The responses to these statements suggest that teachers are uncertain about how far to accept media education as a normal part of their work. Statement 15, concerning the role of audio-visual technologies in media education, also reveals uncertainty about approaches to the media in the classroom beyond text-based work, with more than a third agreeing that understanding and using audio-visual technologies ought to be taken as seriously as reading and writing verbal language, about the same disagreeing and a quarter remaining neutral. These issues will be explored in more detail in the discussion of the media survey.

### Media Survey

To investigate more fully some of the issues involved and to look more closely at provision for media education in secondary schools in this area, we followed up the initial questionnaire with a more detailed survey which was completed by twenty

teachers from the larger sample discussed above. (A copy of the questions used in the survey is included as Appendix 1.)

### **Questions 1 and 2 Entitlement and Placing within Curriculum**

It is reassuring to note that, as one might expect from the previous discussion, there was unanimous agreement that media education should be an entitlement of all pupils. Only one response was qualified, to the extent of noting that 'It should be part of a well-balanced and wide-ranging curriculum.'

On the question of whether media education should be integrated into the English curriculum or taught as a separate subject, views were more diverse. Just over half the sample felt that there was a place for media education in both of these contexts, most of them suggesting that there was some need for specialisation in terms of experience and training which would allow for the more technical aspects of the discipline to be developed while still realising that if there were to be access to media education for all pupils, there was a place for it in the English curriculum. Three respondents indicated that media education should be integrated into the English curriculum, one with the rider that this would be suitable only if English teachers had the 'appropriate knowledge/training'. Similarly, three felt that media education should be a separate subject, two commenting that the demands of the national curriculum in English were such that there would not be time to deal with it satisfactorily; the third of these respondents argued that media education should be 'reinforced in other areas of the curriculum—not just English'. This view was taken further by another teacher who felt that media education should neither be part of English nor a separate subject but entirely dealt with on a cross-curricular basis.

### **Question 3 Aims**

Our third question asked the teachers what they saw as the main aims for the teaching of media education. The responses represent a gradation from, at one extreme, a sense of providing a general awareness of the nature and role of the media in our society to, at the other, a desire to make students aware of the manipulation of society by the media. The former can be illustrated by one response, which proposed: developing critical awareness, exploring a wide range of text, examining and deconstructing popular cultures, fostering co-operative work, developing practical skills and a sense of ownership of learning. At the other end of the spectrum, respondents wrote about developing awareness of 'media manipulation', of propaganda and of the power and influence of the media.

It should perhaps be stressed that there was no clear division here, that the views expressed flowed into one another along this continuum and that the same teacher might offer aims at different points on this scale. The general tenor was certainly one of inquiry, of deepening pupils' understanding of powerful forces at work in our society.

### **Questions 4 and 5 Media Education within the English Department**

In five of the eight schools surveyed there was a member of the English Department with special responsibility for media education. Four of the schools represented had



TABLE II

	School							
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Specialist in media in English department	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Departmental syllabus	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No

produced their own syllabus for the teaching of media education, although as Table II shows, there is no simple correspondence between these two items on the survey. Since, as we shall see later, only one of these schools, school C, does not offer media studies at examination level, it may well be that schools have responded to the question here regarding syllabuses in different ways; this suspicion is highlighted by the fact that school B replied 'No. We run 3 specific media courses ...' (which include GCSE) whereas school F replied 'Yes as a GCSE subject.' There may well have been some doubt as to what was meant by the department's *own* syllabus.

Questions 6, 7, 8, 9 Training for Media Education

Asked if they considered themselves adequately qualified to teach media education, fifteen respondents gave an unequivocal response, nine of them negative, six positive. Of the remainder, two felt qualified in some respects but not in others, a view which was probably close to that of the teacher who felt qualified 'to a certain level.' Another positive response was conditional upon the availability of supporting materials. The most intriguing answer was 'No—but better qualified than anyone else on the staff.' Since two colleagues had answered either wholly or partially in the affirmative, this perhaps shows more than anything the uncertainty which surrounds the issue of what is an adequate qualification for teaching media education.

Ten respondents, half of the sample, reported that they had received no training or qualifications in media education. At the other end of the spectrum, one teacher was clearly highly qualified, having followed a range of INSET and BFI courses and taken an MA degree in Film and Television. Of the others, one had had some training as part of the PGCE course, another had followed an Open University course in Popular Culture: the remainder had benefitted from varying amounts of in-service training, some provided by LEAs, some school or department based.

Everyone agreed that media education should be a part of every English teacher's training, although one respondent would not commit himself beyond 'probably' and another beyond 'some aspects of it'. Set against these, one respondent suggested that media education should be part of *every* teacher's training.

A substantial majority (16 out of 20) indicated that they would like to receive more training in media education; three of the others answered 'no', one adding 'not on top of EVERYTHING ELSE'. The fourth, somewhat cryptically, responded 'possibly'. Two of these four teachers had had no media education training, the others had followed INSET courses.

### Questions 10 and 11 Current Media Education Activities

The next two questions asked, respectively, whether the teachers had undertaken any work with a media focus in the preceding term and whether they were engaged in or were planning any in the current term (the survey was administered at the start of term). Eleven answered positively in respect of both terms, a further five did so in respect of one of the terms and only three responses were negative in relation to both. None of the last group had considered themselves qualified to teach media education and none had received any training.

The amount of detail given in relation to this work varies, as might be reasonably expected from busy teachers, but the information we have suggests a rich variety of experience was being offered to these teachers' students. It is not easy to characterise the work undertaken, because classifications overlap in this field, but the following may give some idea of the range on offer.

A good deal of media work was centred on the study of literary texts, a salutary reminder that the study of literature and media education are seen as complementary rather than mutually exclusive. Five teachers had planned to relate literary texts to film in a variety of ways and another was using an audio tape of *Of Mice and Men*; two were recasting literary works in alternative media formats, in one case in newspaper form and in the other using video; the other work included under this heading comprised a storyboarding of *The Lady of Shallott* and an exploration of propaganda based on *Animal Farm*.

A substantial body of work involving non-literary texts was mentioned. Six teachers referred to work on newspapers and three to work on advertisements. Other specific instances of non-literary text study included activities based on leaflets, publicity materials and posters and Berger's *Ways of Seeing*; there were also a number of more general responses, including 'Fact and Opinion'. An even larger number of teachers cited work on non-print media; seven referred to work on film, ranging from film reviews to an examination of cinematic technique; two had considered aspects of television, one looking at soap operas, the other at the future of the BBC; one was looking more generally at the presentation of gender issues in the media; two were engaged in making videos of the north-east and relating these to parallel media versions; three were working on images in still photography, two making photographic compilations of aspects of their students' experiences, one deconstructing photographic images.

It can clearly be seen, even from this brief synopsis, both that there was a wide range of activity and that conceptions of media education were wide-ranging; this diversity reflected the stated aims of media education discussed above and seemed to us to offer both a valuable insight into the media-rich society in which we live and a useful tool for the study of those literary texts which it seems likely will be a focus for the amended English curriculum. There seems little doubt that much that is of great value to students and teachers will be lost if activities of the kind outlined here are curtailed in the future.

### Questions 12 and 13 Teaching Materials

Asked if they made use of published materials for teaching media education, nine of the sample gave a positive response. It would be impossible to list everything here

TABLE III. Resources available to departments

	School							
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Video camera	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Photographic equipment	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cassette recorder	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Dark room	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
Word processors	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Desktop publishing	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Editing suite	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No

but five respondents mentioned *Media File*, three *Choosing the News* and two used BFI materials.

Seventeen respondents stated that their department produced its own resources for teaching about the media. Only five teachers expanded on their answers to this question, three of them pointing out that development of materials tended to be done on an individual basis, although one added that '[we] quite often share it'. Of the others, one stressed the importance of using contemporary material, the other referred to packages of material for modules such as 'text into film, advertising, representation'.

#### Questions 14, 15 and 16 Resources

Our next question focused on the availability of resources which are listed in Table III. It appears that not all members of all departments were aware of the full range of what was available to them, so the list for each school includes everything mentioned by *any* member of the department concerned.

Perhaps three points need to be made in relation to this table. First, the level of provision appears to be, in general, pleasingly high: there is clearly, on the whole, access to tools which will enable these teachers to engage in a wide range of media work. Second, the one school which is apparently poorly provided for, School C, was represented by only one respondent and the blanket negative to this question leads one to wonder whether there was some misunderstanding; it is difficult to conceive of an English department without access to a cassette recorder, for example. Finally, one must comment on the extent to which members of these departments differed in their awareness of what was available: it would appear that in some of these schools some staff development work might be in order.

We went on to ask which of the items of equipment had been used by respondents in the course of the previous term (see Table IV).

Only two teachers had used none of the equipment listed in the previous term, although since four claimed to have done no work in media education in the previous year it is clear that not all uses of these resources were regarded as relevant to media education.

Our question seeking to establish whether there was an area in the school designated for the teaching of media education drew a more diverse response from members of departments than any other. Of six departments with more than one



TABLE IV. Equipment used in the previous term

Teacher	Video camera	Camera	Cassette	Dark room	Word processor	DTP	Editing suite
A	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
B	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	No
C	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
D	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No
E	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
F	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
G	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
H	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No
I	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
J	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
K	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	No
L	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No
M	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	No
N	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No
O	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
P	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
Q	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
R	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
S	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No

One teacher had used some equipment but gave no details.

member, only one was unanimous in its answers. Of the others, three had a yes/no split, one had a member who didn't know and in the last, although all agreed there was such an area it was variously put at one or two classrooms. Neither of the schools represented here by only one teacher had any designated area. The other six tended to have one or two areas for media education, one of them typically the classroom of the person with responsibility for media education.

The overall picture is one of schools with reasonable resources for media education, with widespread uptake of the facilities available although this positive view must be balanced to some extent by a lack of awareness on the part of some teachers of the full nature of that provision.

### Question 17 Media Studies at Examination Level

Two schools did not offer media studies at examination level; these were the two schools from which we had only one respondent and it may be that the low level of response from these schools reflects a low level of engagement with media issues, a conclusion which would certainly be consistent with the answers of these two teachers.

All the other schools currently offered media studies at GCSE: all those who specified a board were following the NEAB syllabus although three were about to move to the Welsh board and one was going to drop the GCSE after this year. Four of the schools had between 18 and 30 students registered, one had 65 and one 160.

In addition, one school offered a CPVE video course, one a DVE course in communication and entertainment and one an A-level in communication studies with an enrolment of 18 students.

### Questions 18 and 19 Provision across the School

Only four of the eight schools reported provision for media education in curriculum areas other than English. In two schools the history department was mentioned and in others media studies, communication studies, humanities, IT, art and design and PSE were cited as providers.

Of the eight schools, only one had a whole school policy on media education, although one other department, the one which was about to give up GCSE, was working on this. The one positive answer came from a teacher with responsibility for media education who wrote, 'Yes—that media education is an entitlement for all and that it should be offered as part of an English course, although I suspect there are some people who pay lip service, and feel that if a class can storyboard a sequence from a novel, or discuss the front pages of a tabloid and broadsheet paper, then they've covered it.'

### Additional Comments

Four teachers took the opportunity to write in additional comments. All were obviously committed to media education. Two wrote largely to express their sense of the value and importance of media education, one arguing that it should expand and the other suggesting that 'It's far more important that students understand media today than Shakespeare 400 years ago (though both would be nice)' and that media education 'ought to be more integrated into the work of the English lessons'. The other two expressed their pessimism at what they saw as a likely future with media education losing its place in the National Curriculum. In the words of one, 'Anyone who has *anything* to do with media education ... should express concern and anger at the new proposals to wipe it off the National Curriculum'.

### Conclusions

Given the current direction English teaching is taking, as revealed in our study, a return to the narrow prescriptions that the rewrite of the English curriculum appears to demand will polarise even further the views of the NCC from the vast majority of English teachers who will be expected to deliver the curriculum. This will add to the loss of good will and sense of frustration that teachers of English are feeling because of government impositions. The revisions will also seriously threaten to undermine teachers' professionalism in the exercising of their initiative and judgement in the classroom.

Our research supports Cox's (1991) view, and Goodwyn's (1992b) findings, that English teachers favour a broad approach to the curriculum in which personal response to and critical analysis of a wide range of literary, media and non-media texts are seen as essential to ensure the personal growth of the pupil. Such knowledge will develop an understanding that there are many ways of being in the world, of constructing the world, and seeing the world. The broad approach to language and text is also reflected in the fact that teachers in the survey drew little distinction between literature and media work, as both are considered forms of reading in the National Curriculum for English where media education mainly comes under the reading attainment targets, and they used a whole range of texts to teach about language structure.

If media education is dropped from the English curriculum, it will be without a subject base and therefore not taught and assessed under the new arrangements: as a result it will become fragmented and with it any notion of entitlement will be destroyed. As our survey shows, aspects of media do appear in other subject areas but it is patchy, relying on a few enthusiasts, and without a firm base in English it will go the way of other failed cross-curricular initiatives. Rather than destroying the recent developments that our survey has revealed, and in order to prepare young people for the demands of the twenty-first century, we should be encouraging teachers by building on the present curriculum and developing their expertise through the sharing of good practice and responding to the demands for more initial and in-service training. This would also give media education a more central place in the English curriculum and end some of the insecurity and uncertainty revealed in our study about how it should be implemented in the classroom.

As Cox (1993) has argued, the Right's nostalgic 1950s or 1930s English curriculum is not a curriculum for the end of the twentieth century. Trying to inoculate the population with a dose of the literary canon has been tried before (see Masterman 1985) and is doomed to fail. Film, television, video, radio and the print media are central to our culture: giving young people the tools to analyse and understand, rather than resist, the media so that they demand quality products that will inform, delight and move, is a challenge for the end of the twentieth century and an essential skill for the twenty-first century. Limiting the study of language to a prescribed grammar that does not take account of the way language is used and of the wealth, diversity and needs of a large multi-ethnic and multi-lingual school population will also fail. The educational right's imposition of a limiting orthodoxy and disabling nostalgia on the teaching of English, leading to a narrow, sterile curriculum less related to the daily lives of our pupils, must be challenged and resisted by the profession. We should be building bridges to the next century, by designing a curriculum which will provide the knowledge and skills that will measure up to the changing demands of tomorrow, not destroy them.

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## APPENDIX 1—Media Education Survey

- (1) Should media education be an entitlement of all pupils?
- (2) Should media education be integrated into the English curriculum or should it be taught as a separate subject? Please give your reasons.
- (3) What do you see as the main aims for the teaching of media education?
- (4) Is there a member of the English department with special responsibility for media education?
- (5) Has the department produced its own syllabus for the teaching of media education?
- (6) Do you consider yourself adequately qualified to teach media education?
- (7) Have you received any training or qualifications in media education? Please give details.
- (8) Should media education be a part of every English teacher's training?
- (9) Would you like to receive more training in media education?
- (10) Did you plan any work with a media focus during the last term? If yes, please give details.
- (11) Are you engaged in or planning any work on the media this term? If yes, please give details.
- (12) Do you make use of published materials for teaching media education? If yes, please give details.
- (13) Does your department produce its own resources for teaching about the media?
- (14) Has the department access to audio-visual technology and information technology (e.g. video camera, editing suite, cassette recorder photographic equipment, dark room, word processors, desk top publishing system) for practical work in media education? If yes, please specify.
- (15) Have you made use of any of this equipment in the last term? Please give details.
- (16) Is there an area in the school designated for the teaching of media education? If yes, please give details.
- (17) Is media studies offered at examination level? If yes, please specify syllabuses and numbers of students following the courses.
- (18) Is media education covered in any other areas of the curriculum? Please give details.
- (19) Does the school have a whole school policy on media education?

Time for Refilling the Bath?: a study of primary  
student-teachers' grammatical knowledge

John Williamson and Frank Hardman

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# TIME FOR REFILLING THE BATH?: A STUDY OF PRIMARY STUDENT-TEACHERS' GRAMMATICAL KNOWLEDGE

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Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 7RU*

**Abstract** The introduction of the National Curriculum for English in England and Wales has placed an increased demand on primary teachers to promote a greater knowledge about language including the teaching of grammar. Critics of the English curriculum believe, however, that too little attention has been paid to the teaching of grammar and proposals for a revised curriculum which place more emphasis on the teaching of grammatical structure and terminology have been put forward. This study investigates the current levels of some aspects of grammatical knowledge amongst 99 trainee primary school teachers. Results indicate a higher level of grammatical knowledge than some critics might have us suppose. There are, however, significant gaps which could affect the student-teachers' ability to teach about language and grammar, and to analyse and help develop pupils' use of language, which suggest the need for a systematic course of study during initial teacher training and beyond.

## Introduction

Since the mid-1970s two major government reports into the teaching of English in England and Wales (DES, 1975, 1988) have called for a systematic course of study in language to promote a higher level of awareness of the properties and functions of language on the part of teachers, particularly in their initial training and through in-service courses. More recently, the Cox Report (DES, 1989), which formed the basis of the National Curriculum for English in England and Wales, put forward a curriculum which was largely language-centred and placed a greater demand on teachers to promote knowledge about language. However, all of them have rejected a return to 'traditional grammar teaching', as advocated by Marenbon (1987), which is once again on the government's educational agenda.

Two recent studies of the subject knowledge base about language amongst student teachers training to be primary teachers (Chandler *et al.* 1988; Wray, 1993) suggest that there are important gaps in their knowledge which may have important implications for their effectiveness as teachers and ability to teach and assess pupils across the primary age range for English in the National Curriculum (i.e. to the level which an able 11 year old, or an average 14 year old, would be



expected to reach, which is defined as Level 6 of a 10 level curriculum). Both studies revealed gaps in knowledge about parts of speech and general language awareness (i.e. differences between spoken and written language, accent and dialect, knowledge of morphology, patterning in language and literary language). The present study goes beyond parts of speech to look at elements of clause and sentence structure, investigate the students' ability to apply this knowledge to their analysis of children's writing and to explore the implications of the proposed revisions to English in the National Curriculum.

Hudson (1992) argues that students now undergoing teacher training are, in the main, from a 'post-traditional grammar' era. He suggests that Britain is now a country without school grammar due to the rejection of old-style grammar teaching as taught prior to the 1960s. This was characterised by parsing (the analysis of clauses into component parts), and decontextualised drills and exercises so that pupils had to learn parts of speech by heart and be tested on their ability to identify and label grammatical forms as a set of discrete items. In rejecting the old style grammar, however, Hudson feels that this is 'a clear case of an important baby being thrown out with some rather dirty bathwater' so that we have a generation of students training to be teachers who know very little about the structure of their own language.

Knowledge about language has become even more of a focus of interest in the teaching of English since the introduction of the National Curriculum for English, and the setting up of the Language in the National Curriculum (LINC, n.d.) project which was to provide training and materials to implement the language requirements of the National Curriculum. The issue has, however, become highly politicised (see Williamson & Hardman, 1994) with calls from the educational right for a return to more formalistic approaches to English teaching and a more prescriptive view of the teaching of what they simplistically regard as standard English. This has resulted in the government's suppression of the LINC project, with its sociolinguistic approach and emphasis on investigative and active approaches to language study, and proposals for a revision to the National Curriculum for English (DFE, 1993a; NCC, 1993; SCAA, 1994) which place more emphasis on the need to teach standard spoken and written English and the rules of standard English grammar to all pupils. The proposed revisions to the National Curriculum for English also include more explicit grammatical terminology as part of a 'parts of speech' approach to grammatical structure than was the case in the original Cox Curriculum; the latest set of proposals (SCAA, 1994: 24) require that:

Pupils should begin to develop their understanding of sentence grammar, specifically the syntax of complex sentences, including clauses and phrases. They should also be taught how to use paragraphs, linking sentences together coherently. They should be taught to use correctly nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, prepositions, conjunctions, singular/plural forms and verb tenses.

If teachers are to help pupils meet these requirements, they must themselves have a substantial body of grammatical knowledge. While we acknowledge that the relationship between children's knowledge about language and their use of

language is a complex one, we have no doubt that the teacher's knowledge is an important factor in helping pupils develop their understanding of language and its use.

Little is known about the extent to which students training to become primary teachers have a suitable level of knowledge about language in order to teach the revised English National Curriculum and to provide them with a framework for the analysis of children's language development. Building on the two previous studies (Chandler *et al.*, 1988; Wray, 1993) which pre-date the current revisions, we decided to investigate the level of grammatical knowledge amongst a complete cohort of 99 students at the start of a one year course of primary teacher training leading to the award of the Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE). A questionnaire (see Appendix 1) was administered during the first week of the students' training course, before they had received any input on the aspects of knowledge about language on which they were to be tested.

### The Questionnaire

The questionnaire drew on the grammatical knowledge expected of the 'average' 11 year old pupil at Level 5 of the National Curriculum, as proposed in the first consultation document from the Department for Education (DFE, 1993a) for revising the English Order.

The first section of the questionnaire called on the students to identify underlined items in each of ten sentences: seven of these were single words which we hoped the students would identify as parts of speech; two were clauses (one co-ordinate and one subordinate) and the final item was a phrase. A pilot study had been administered to a different group of students and it was found helpful to ask the students to use grammatical terminology so as to avoid lengthy non-technical descriptions of some of the items.

The second section sought to gather information about some of these items using a variety of different elicitation procedures; we asked for: definitions of four of the parts of speech; an example of a subordinate clause and an explanation of the difference between phrases and clauses. We also sought to determine whether students could tell us where full stops should be used, to give us an insight into their concept of the sentence, and asked for three common uses for commas.

The third section sought to gather information on the students' ability to analyse and comment on three extracts from children's writing to see if they could not only identify the grammatical errors but also recognise linguistic achievements in the writing. In other words, did they have sufficient meta-linguistic knowledge which would enable them to identify points for development in the children's writing, as this was a skill that they would need when responding to children's writing.

The fourth section, made up of 12 statements and using a 5 point likert scale, looked at the students' attitudes to the teaching of grammatical knowledge as proposed for Level 5 of the revised English Order (DFE, 1993a).

## Findings

### Section A: Parts of Speech

The findings for each question have been classified in terms of whether the student has provided an appropriate term, has offered a description without technical language, has given an incorrect answer or has made no response to the item at all. For many of the items, students have given a descriptive response, attempting to explain in non-technical language the role played in each sentence by the underlined element: we have not attempted to analyse these in any detail because the point of this study is to elucidate the extent to which these intending teachers can demonstrate an ability to use simple linguistic terminology for items which their pupils seem likely to be required to understand in the revised version of the National Curriculum for English.

#### *Item 1: 'The buns taste nice'*

If we accept 'subject' as a correct response (arguably, The *buns* is the subject, but that is perhaps rather a fine distinction), then well over 90% of the group have shown appropriate use of grammatical terminology. Thirteen of the group made double entries, ten adding 'subject' to 'noun', three adding 'object' to 'noun'. The other incorrect responses were: 'object' (twice), 'adjective', 'describing the object'.

#### *Item 2: 'The heavy book was placed upon the table'*

A small, but not insignificant, number did not use the grammatical term but, perhaps drawing on memories of school grammar, categorised this item as a describing word. The incorrect response, from one of the students who had made an error in the previous question, was 'verb'.

#### *Item 3: 'I saw an elephant'*

All bar six of the respondents identified the verb, using the grammatical term. This was the only item on which there were no incorrect answers.

Table 1 Responses to items calling for the identification of parts of speech

<i>Item</i>	<i>Appropriate linguistic response</i>	<i>Descriptive response</i>	<i>Incorrect</i>	<i>No Response</i>
1	94	0	4	1
2	89	9	1	0
3	93	2	0	4
4	49	10	9	31
5	64	11	7	17
6	72	11	15	1
7	42	30	6	21



*Item 4: 'We are in a restaurant'*

The preposition was one of only two of this set of items which was identified by less than half the sample; it had much the highest no response rate; relatively few people attempted a description, which probably reflects the lack of provision of a notional definition in the respondents' own school experience of grammar. Incorrect responses were 'conjunction' (four times) 'pronoun' (twice), 'adverb' (twice) and 'noun'.

*Item 5: 'John arrived late for the lecture because he had been delayed in the traffic jam'*

As with Question 1, there were two possible correct answers; we had anticipated 'pronoun', which was the answer provided by just over half the group, but 'subject' was an acceptable alternative. It is noteworthy that about a quarter of the group provided no response or an incorrect one. Four respondents classified the pronoun as a noun, two as the definite article and one as 'object'.

*Item 6: 'The students went quickly about their business'*

The incorrect responses were verb (twice) and adjective (thirteen times). Clearly, there are two ways of looking at this set of results: we could argue that it is reassuring that well over two thirds of the group successfully completed this item, or we might feel concern that less than three quarters used the term 'adverb' when faced with a prompt such as this and that one graduate in six gave an entirely incorrect answer, or no answer at all, in respect of a linguistic item which their pupils will have to learn to 'use correctly' (NCC, 1993: 64) and one which, it has been suggested (DFE, 1993a: 57), pupils should 'use correctly and understand the function of' by Level 4 (that is, at the level which 'pupils should typically be capable of achieving . . . at or near' the age of eleven (DES, 1990: 5)).

*Item 7: 'I saw a car and a bus'*

The conjunction drew the lowest number of appropriate linguistic responses although nearly a third of the group felt able to offer a description of its function here. There were relatively few incorrect answers, five students classifying 'and' as a preposition and one as a pronoun.

Overall, while clearly one is reluctant to extrapolate too extravagantly from a relatively limited sample, responses to these identification tests would seem to fall into three categories: noun, adjective and verb were all identified by the overwhelming majority of the students and clearly are terms with which all but a very small minority are familiar; on the evidence we have, pronoun and adverb might present something of a problem to about a third of these trainee primary teachers; there is even more ground for concern in respect of prepositions and conjunctions with less than half the group identifying examples.

Clauses and phrases

The last three items in this section of the questionnaire looked for the identification of, in Questions 8 and 10, clauses (one co-ordinated, the other subordinated) and, in Question 9, a phrase. The relevance of this distinction to intending primary school teachers is made clear by the National Curriculum Council, who assert in the Programme of Study for Key Stage 2:

[Pupils] should understand the difference between ‘clause’ and ‘phrase’. (DFE, 1993a: 64)

Item 8: Responses to ‘I made a cup of tea and poached an egg’

Table 2

‘Clause’	Descriptive response	Incorrect	No response	Linguistic analysis
6	12	17	39	25

Of the six who identified this unit as a clause, three misrepresented it as a subordinate clause; five of the six reported having had a linguistics/language component in their degree; a far larger number (about a third of whom had studied linguistics) offered a linguistic analysis of the elements of the underlined clause, mostly with some accuracy: sixteen correctly analysed the structure as verb plus noun, three as verb plus object, and one as verb article noun; less accurately, two analysed the clause as simply consisting of a verb, one as verb conjunction noun, one as object and one, contentiously, as verb phrase (it depends what you mean by ‘verb phrase’.) The large number of respondents who provided an ‘alternative’ but linguistically correct response here makes evaluation of this item somewhat difficult (there was no parallel on the other item based on the clause.) What is clear is that well over half the group could not provide a suitable term for this linguistic unit.

Item 9: Responses to ‘The other day I brought my bike to the university’

Table 3

‘Phrase’	Descriptive response	Incorrect	No response	Linguistic analysis
12	18	11	55	3

It is quite clear from Table 3 that only a small minority were capable of identifying the phrase underlined. In the final column, two students identified

the element as 'adverb' which is a reasonable description of this phrase's function within the sentence; the third identified the noun in the phrase. Of the incorrect responses, two were 'pronoun' and the others classified the element as a clause.

*Item 10: Responses to 'When I arrived home I made a cup of tea'*

**Table 4**

<i>Clause</i>	<i>Descriptive response</i>	<i>Incorrect</i>	<i>No response</i>	<i>Linguistic analysis</i>
13	10	6	59	9

As with the previous item, it is worth noting that about two thirds of the respondents provided an erroneous answer or gave no response at all, as shown in Table 4. All of the incorrect answers on this item were 'phrase'. Of the nine which gave alternative linguistic analyses, two classified the clause as an adverb, which is reasonable, and the others offered analyses of various subcomponents of the clause.

Taking these three items as a whole, it is clear that there is a substantial amount of work to be done to make sure that students beginning a primary PGCE course are themselves sufficiently conversant with the basic terms required by the National Curriculum to be able to develop their pupils' understanding and language use.

The average score across the ten questions is 5.6; the students who reported having had a linguistics/language element in their degree scored rather higher, at 6.5 (leaving the average for those who had not followed such a course at 5.2), suggesting some slight advantage in such a course for those intending to teach, although it must be noted that the ten students who had a literature component in their degree but no linguistics had a higher still average of 7.2. Possibly more significant is the very low score of the ten who had not studied a foreign language at GCSE/O level or above—this group averaged a mere 4.1. Chandler *et al.* (1988) also found that knowledge of a foreign language had a significant effect on students' structural knowledge. Study of English at 'A' level also seemed to have some effect, although a lesser one, the 40 students who had not followed an 'A' level English course averaging 5.0. Clearly, it would be an impossible task to offer a definitive explanation for the differences in scores which range from 0 to 10, especially with a sample the size of ours; there are perhaps some pointers here, but we would argue in any case that the essential point is that there is a deficit here for many of the students which has to be made up.

### **Section B: Parts of Speech**

The first part of section B took four of the parts of speech which the student-teachers had been asked to identify in Section A and asked the group how they would define each.



*Noun*

As might be expected the commonest approach by far was a notional one, seeking to define the noun in terms of the kinds of referent with which it was seen to be associated. Of the 99 student-teachers, 53 defined nouns as naming words, with many adding one or more of the categories outlined in Table 5.

Table 5 Number of students defining nouns in terms of notional categories

<i>Person</i>	<i>Place</i>	<i>Thing</i>	<i>Object</i>	<i>Animal</i>	<i>Concept</i>
22	18	31	44	1	2

It is striking that the overwhelming majority of these definitions focus on concrete nouns; it is unfortunate that we did not include an abstract noun in the identification tests to let us see whether the students would have been able to pick out a noun not covered by their definition. A small number of students provided some more linguistically sophisticated information: two referred to the distinction between proper nouns and common nouns; more relevant, perhaps, were the nine who offered some kind of functional definition of the noun as being capable of acting as the subject or object of a sentence. Finally, seventeen of the group offered an ostensive definition by providing examples of nouns.

*Verb*

As with the noun, definitions of the verb seemed to rely heavily on recollections of grammar lessons from the students' own primary school experience; all of the students defined verbs as 'doing words' or 'action words' (or sometimes both—there were 78 entries for 'doing word' and 45 for 'action'). Again, a significant minority felt that exemplification would be helpful—16 gave examples of verbs.

*Adjective*

The central concept in relation to adjectives was unanimously that of description. Without exception, the students defined adjectives as 'describing' or 'descriptive' words; just over half the group—51 students—also indicated that adjectives describe nouns. Rather fewer students (13) gave examples than for nouns or verbs.

*Adverb*

A large proportion of the students, 76 out of 99, defined the adverb as a word which describes a verb (in a few cases, students used their definition of 'verb' rather than the term itself); two more characterised it as a describing word but

without reference to the verb; one respondent saw the adverb as giving an indication of time or place. Two offered and exemplified erroneous responses: one defined the adverb as 'An action or verb that is descriptive e.g. jump becomes *jumping*'; the other suggested 'A word that goes before a verb (*quick* runner)'. Again, it is heartening that about three quarters of the sample have a working definition of this basic term although clearly a substantial minority have some work to do in this category.

### Clauses and phrases

Question 2 sought further to elucidate respondents' understanding of the term 'clause' which had also been tested in Section A. Here we asked the students to write a sentence including a subordinate clause and to underline the clause in question.

This was accomplished successfully by only 22 students; 13 gave incorrect answers, 60 failed to respond and 4 did not underline any part of the sentence they had written. The 13 incorrect answers included 6 who had underlined clauses but not subordinate ones, 5 who listed phrases and 2 who underlined conjunctions (both of which introduced subordinate clauses). It is interesting that this test yielded higher scores than either of the clause identification tests in Section A. Even so, it is of some concern that only one student in five could satisfactorily answer this question and that nearly two thirds could make no response whatever.

The findings here can be related to those for Question 5, which asked 'What is the difference between a clause and a phrase?' Only 9 students could answer this correctly, with 36 making incorrect answers and 54 of the sample refraining from comment. Clearly, if these students are going to enable their pupils 'to understand the difference between 'clause' and 'phrase'' (DFE, 1993a: 58; NCC, 1993: 64) there is a need for considerable input in their initial training. This would seem to apply irrespective of the content of the students' first degrees, since only 4 of the 9 acceptable answers came from students with a language/linguistics component in their degree, from a total of 27 students in that category.

### *The sentence*

Question 3 in this section sought to find out what the students believed to be the defining characteristics of the sentence. Only 14 students did not offer an answer, the overwhelming majority answering in terms of concepts such as that of complete sense or a natural pause. The sentence is not an easy unit to define in any terms but to categorise it as a complete thought presents serious difficulties: 'Mary came home from work' is arguably a complete thought and can certainly function as a sentence as can 'John made tea'. Yet 'Mary came home from work and John made tea' is equally a sentence and must obviously contain at least the two ideas to be found when the propositions were written as separate sentences. Essentially, the sentence is a unit of grammar not of 'thought', which can only

be explained in grammatical terms, and is a concept which children need to be helped to develop by building their understanding of the elements which combine to form sentences and the ways in which they form coherent, independent structures. Fourteen of the students at least attempted to offer a grammatical definition although no-one came close to the key concept of internal grammatical coherence. 'Sentence' is a linguistic term to which pupils are to be introduced in Key Stage 1 (even earlier than 'phrase' and 'clause' (DFE, 1993a: 52; NCC, 1993: 60) and if students are to develop ways of doing this, there is clearly a need for them to sharpen their own understanding first.

### *The comma*

Whereas the sentence is mentioned in the English National Curriculum as a term to be introduced, the comma is mentioned as something for learners to be able to use; by Level 4, in Key Stage 2 of the National Curriculum, it is proposed that pupils should be able to 'use commas to: list items (books, pencils, paper and pens) and separate clauses from the rest of the sentence' (DFE, 1993a: 57; NCC, 1993a: 65). Listing was cited as a function of commas by 28 of the sample and 14 mentioned their use to separate clauses; a much larger number, 59, responded in much more vague terms like 'breaking up sentences', 'at natural pauses' or 'for breath'. Admittedly, some cited uses not mentioned in the revised curriculum, such as before speech marks or to mark off words like 'however' or 'although' and there is clearly a possibility in this item that students may have had more knowledge than they displayed but at the very least a substantial number need to be made more explicitly aware of the patterns which they are, hopefully, using on an intuitive level.

### Section C

In this section of the questionnaire, the students were asked to comment on three extracts from primary children's writing to discuss the grammatical errors and successes in the writing. In the first extract, the students were given a piece of writing which is typical of a 7 year old pupil at Key Stage 1 of the National Curriculum.

One day Mel and me took the dog for a walk and the dog ran away and David ran after it and caught it and we went home and had our tea.

It is a personal report in which the actions and events are chained together by the linking word *and*. In this respect it is close to speech with the most obvious feature being *Mel and me*, a feature of many spoken dialects rather than the standard written English *Mel and I*. 85% of the students pointed out this grammatical usage and 58% commented on the overuse of *and* to link the clauses; 13% also corrected the sentence with more complex linkages of the clauses. However, only 3% drew attention to the fact that it was close to speech, and while the questionnaire did not specifically ask about differences between spoken and written grammar, such an understanding would be important in helping and



encouraging pupils to understand the differences between their own dialect in speech and the use in writing of standard English forms such as *Me* and *I*, and to develop more appropriate ways of linking the clauses in writing to demonstrate cause and effect. 14% also commented on the inappropriateness of the third person form *David ran after it . . .* which does not fit in with the first part of the narrative; this may, paradoxically, be evidence of a half-formed understanding that writing needs to be more formal than speech—something that can be developed, rather than criticised. The majority did not comment on its positive features: 32% commented on the sense of story structure and 12% drew attention to the pupil's use of the past tense throughout.

When the box and polystyrene which kept it neatly packaged there in front of us stood a six foot robot, he had shrunk without the packing.

In the above extract, from a 10 year old pupil, the majority stated that it was confusing, disjointed or muddled because of the sentence structure and therefore very difficult to follow. In fact the pupil has started with a complex structure in which three clauses are inter-related: an adverbial clause of time (*when . . .*), a relative clause (*which . . .*) and a main clause (*there stood . . .*). What makes the extract problematical is the lack of a verb element which is expected after the interposed relative clause. It can be assumed that the pupil intended to complete the *when* clause with something like *was opened*. While 20% of the students commented that a word or words had been missed out, only 4% stated that it was a verb. Knowledge of grammar in this case would have helped the students to acknowledge and understand the complexity of what is being attempted rather than disparage, as did the majority of students, the only partial achievement. The further complexity of *there in front of us stood* should also be noted as it is an inverted construction that heightens the drama of the occasion being described. 10% did, however, draw attention to the pupil's effective use of vocabulary.

Finally in this section the students were asked to comment on the following extract from a 9 year old pupil:

We walk for three mile and didn't see nothing bigger than a dog.

This extract produced the largest number of comments and suggested corrections. Most students pointed out that *walk* was wrong and added *-ed* to the base form of the verb, and 56% stated that the pupil had mixed up tenses. Similarly, 49% corrected *miles* with a plural 's' and 62% corrected *nothing* to *anything*. 27% also commented on the use of the double negative in *didn't see nothing*. As in the first extract the writing is very close to speech, a feature noted by 9% of the students, which would account for the grammatical errors, particularly the double negative as it is a feature of a range of spoken dialects. Again, it is within this context that the corrections need to be placed so that pupils can be helped to learn about the grammar of standard English and to appreciate the differences between using their own dialect in speech and the use of standard English forms in writing.

It is clear from this section of the questionnaire that while most of the students

had enough grammatical knowledge to identify superficial features of the text, their linguistic understanding needs to be developed in at least two areas. They need, first, a deeper understanding of the process of grammatical development in children's use of language, particularly with regard to writing, an understanding which other sections of this paper suggest may involve acquiring a fuller knowledge of the grammar of English itself as well as an appreciation of the stages through which children tend to pass. Allied to this is a need for a broader awareness of such issues as the relationship between speech and writing and that between standard English and non-standard dialects. Without such deeper understanding of the complexity of the tasks in which children are engaged, comment on their work is likely to be superficial, over-negative because of a lack of understanding of the positive achievements which have been made and, above all, will not be based on the insight which is necessary if teachers are to play their full part in helping children develop as writers.

#### Section D

In this section of the questionnaire, the students were asked about their views on the teaching of the various grammatical features and terminology covered in the previous sections to pupils by the age of 11 in the form of 12 statements on which they were asked to show agreement or disagreement using a 5 point likert scale.

With regard to the teaching of parts of speech (Statements 1 to 7), over 90% of the student-teachers agreed that by the age of 11 pupils should be taught to use nouns, verbs and adjectives and understand their functions, and 71% agreed that they should understand and use adverbs correctly. Two thirds also thought that by the age of 11 children should be taught to use pronouns. There was, however, less agreement about the teaching of prepositions: 40% agreed that they should be taught and 50% indicated that they were unsure; similarly with conjunctions, 31% agreed they should be taught and 56% stated they were unsure.

In response to Statement 8 that 11 year olds should be taught to understand the difference between a clause and phrase, and about the subordination of clauses, only 11% agreed, 29% disagreed and 59% were unsure. Nearly half of the student-teachers agreed, however, with Statement 9 that by the age of 11 children should begin to develop their understanding of sentence grammar and learn that complex sentences contain more than one clause, although 39% were unsure. In response to Statement 10, that primary children should be taught the effective use of paragraphs, 80% agreed and 74% also agreed with Statement 11 that they should use verb tenses 'correctly' in their writing. In the final statement concerning the teaching of spoken standard English from the age of 7, over half agreed, 23% disagreed and 25% were unsure, perhaps reflecting the contentious nature of the term 'spoken standard English'.

At this stage in their training the results above show that the majority of student-teachers want to teach about the formal aspects of language, particularly about the terms noun, verb and adjective, although it is not known how they would teach them. There is less support, however, for those parts of speech



where the students themselves show less knowledge as in the case of prepositions and conjunctions where over half were unsure, reflecting the fact that less than half of the group could identify these parts of speech. Similarly there was a low level of support for teaching about clauses and phrases when well over half the students could not identify a clause and less than a third a phrase. Support for teaching about a grammatical feature therefore correlates strongly with knowledge of grammatical terminology and function amongst the students.

## Conclusion

While the questionnaire only looked at grammar at the sentence level, which should constitute only one part of a wider framework of language study, it does reveal significant gaps in the student-teachers' knowledge although it is not as low as some critics might have us believe. It also reveals misconceptions and the lack of a metalanguage for talking about and analysing language use. Recent studies of primary teacher education (see Bennett & Carre, 1993) suggest there is a relationship between knowledge bases and teaching performance and point to the need for a more detailed and rigorous conceptual framework and knowledge base in teacher training to facilitate more effective teaching and learning. Our findings suggest this is also true for teaching about language and grammar. because without a systematic approach there is a danger that the misconceptions and dogmatic attitudes revealed in our study, probably from half-remembered school grammar textbooks, will be passed on. And without a significant input during their initial training, and through in-service courses, bad practice will continue with the teaching of trivial skills and false facts of the kind illustrated in our study.

Through the systematic study of language a metalanguage can also be developed which will build on the student-teachers' intuitive knowledge demonstrated in our study. This will help to improve their analytical competence so that they can talk in an informed and precise way about the patterns and effects of language, and share and develop this knowledge with their pupils. And as our section on children's writing revealed, and Perera (1987) argues, student-teachers also need a conceptual framework and metalanguage for diagnosing, discussing and restructuring written work in order to help the pupils improve their performance.

In advocating courses in the systematic study of grammar as part of language study, there is a need to develop new pedagogic practices which, as Carter (1990) argues, avoid the worst excesses of formalism but are systematically organised. The Language in the National Curriculum (LINC, n.d.) project started to develop such approaches which were multi-genre, activity-based, and investigative in nature so as to allow pupils to discover general patterns for themselves, and which placed the study of language in its wider social and cultural context. Although the project was rejected by the government, its influence can still be seen in recent publications on the teaching of grammar (see for example Hudson, 1992; Shepherd, 1993). However, the shift in the political agenda reflected in proposals to revise the English order, together with



calls from politicians for a return to 'traditional grammar', poses a real threat to these developments.

The recent government proposal to remove initial teacher training from higher education in England and Wales (DFE, 1993b) and move towards school-centred form of teacher training also has implications for the teaching of language and grammar, particularly if school mentors have a similar profile to the students we have studied. It seems to us that not only is there a role for tutors in higher education in respect of trainee teachers, but also, very probably, there is a need for in-service courses for primary teachers currently practising, a need, of course, which can only be established by a further study along the lines of the present one.

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## Appendix 1

University of Newcastle upon Tyne, Department of Education,  
Primary English Questionnaire

Identification number: \_\_\_\_\_

Degree subject(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Was there a linguistics/language component in the degree Yes/no (please circle)

Course: Lower/upper primary (please circle)

Which curriculum area(s) would you like to offer as a specialism? (e.g. science, technology, humanities, art etc)

Have you studied English to 'A' level? If so, please state subject(s) and grade(s):

Have you studied a foreign language to 'O' level/GCSE? If so please state subject(s) and grade(s):

Have you studied a foreign language to 'A' level? If so, please state subject(s) and grade(s):

## Section A

Below are a series of sentences. In each case, please describe the function of the words which have been *italicised and underlined* in the sentences. Please write your answers in the space provided.

(1) The buns taste nice.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(2) The heavy book was placed upon the table.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(3) I saw an elephant.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(4) We ate in a restaurant.

(5) John arrived late for the lecture because he had been delayed in the traffic jam.

---

(6) The students went quickly about their business.

---

(7) I saw a car and a bus.

---

(8) I made a cup of tea and poached an egg.

---

(9) The other day I brought my bike to the university.

---

(10) When I arrived home I made a cup of tea.

---

### Section B

Each of the extracts below is taken from a child's writing. Please comment briefly in the space provided on what you think, if anything, is grammatically wrong with the piece of writing and what has been successfully achieved by the child.

(a) One day Mel and me took the dog for a walk and the dog ran away and David ran after it and caught it and we went home and had our tea.  
(David—aged 7)

Comments

---

(b) When the box and polystyrene which kept it neatly packaged there in front of us stood a six foot robot, he shrunk without the packing.  
(James—aged 10)

Comments

---

(c) We walk for three mile and didn't see nothing bigger than a dog.  
(Karen—aged 9)

Comments

---



Section C

(1) How would you define each of the following terms:

- i. noun
- ii. verb
- iii. adjective
- iv. adverb

- (2) Write a sentence including a subordinate clause, and underline the subordinate clause in the sentence.
- (3) Where do full stops go? If you answer 'at the end of the sentence', how do you know when a sentence has ended?
- (4) List three common uses for commas.
- (5) What is the difference between a clause and a phrase?

Section D

Please show your agreement or disagreement with the statements below by using the following scale:

1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = unsure, 4 = disagree, 5 = strongly disagree

- (1) By the age of 11 children should be taught to use nouns correctly and understand their functions.

12345
- (2) By the age of 11 children should be taught to use verbs correctly and understand their functions.

12345
- (3) By the age of 11 children should be taught to use adjectives correctly and understand their functions.

12345
- (4) By the age of 11 children should be taught to use adverbs correctly and understand their functions.

12345

- (5) By the age of 11 children should be taught to use pronouns correctly and understand their functions.

12345
- (6) By the age of 11 children should be taught to use prepositions correctly and understand their functions.

12345
- (7) By the age of 11 children should be taught to use conjunctions correctly and understand their functions.

12345
- (8) By the age of 11 children should be taught and understand the difference between a clause and phrase, and about the subordination of clauses.

12345
- (9) By the age of 11 children should begin to develop their understanding of sentence grammar and learn that complex sentences contain more than one clause.

12345
- (10) By the age of 11 children should be taught the effective use of paragraphs.

12345
- (11) By the age of 11 children should use verb tenses correctly in their writing.

12345
- (12) Spoken standard English should be taught to all children from the age of 7.

12345

Many thanks for completing this questionnaire. Have you any further comments?

**Canny Writers: Tyneside dialect and the writing  
of secondary school students**

**John Williamson**

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# Canny Writers: Tyneside dialect and the writing of secondary school students

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**SUMMARY** *The issue of writing in accordance with the conventions of standard English usage is one which is becoming increasingly prominent, with changes in the National Curriculum in English reflecting concerns about correctness in language. The present study examines the writing of a group of Year 11 pupils to examine the nature of the deviance of their writing from standard English patterns and, in particular, to assess the impact of non-standard dialect forms on their written work. Errors in writing are seen to be very largely attributable to difficulties with such aspects of the system as punctuation, spelling and other orthographic features. There is evidence of non-standard dialect influences on grammar and vocabulary but these are relatively slight, and, it is argued, should not be the prime concern of teachers interested in meeting the demands of the National Curriculum with regard to writing.*

## Introduction

Ever since the introduction of the National Curriculum in English (Department of Education and Science [DES], 1990) there has been a requirement that pupils should develop the ability to write in standard English. It seems clear from the draft proposals for the revised English curriculum, however, that teachers will be required to take their concern with 'correctness' in English a good deal further.

The earlier documents, following on from the Cox Report (DES, 1989), call, even at level 9, for nothing more specific than 'assured and selective use of a wide range of grammatical constructions which are appropriate for topic, purpose and audience ...' (DES, 1990, p. 15). It is striking that, in the context of a document which is generally much less detailed, though undoubtedly more prescriptive, than its predecessor, we find the new National Curriculum specifying that 'Pupils should be given opportunities to develop their use of essential features of Standard English: grammatically correct expression, accurate spelling, conventional punctuation and an extensive vocabulary' (School Curriculum and Assessment Authority [SCAA], 1994, p. 27). To this is added (p. 28) a requirement for 'the effective use of the full range of punctuation marks: full stops,

commas, question marks, apostrophes, colons, semicolons, hyphens, dashes, inverted commas, exclamation marks'. This corresponds to 'punctuate writing so that meaning and structure are clear to the reader' in the original curriculum (DES, 1990, p. 15). Similarly, in relation to spelling the proposed revisions have a tenor which sits ill with Cox's assertion that 'The aim cannot be the correct unaided spelling of any English word' (DES, 1989, 17.33). While SCAA's note on spelling (1994, p. 27) does not explicitly contradict Cox, the emphasis seems clearly different: 'In spelling, pupils should be helped to increase their knowledge of regular patterns of spelling, word families, roots of words and their derivations. They should learn to spell correctly complex polysyllabic words which do not conform to regular patterns. They should proofread their writing carefully to check for errors and use dictionaries to aid correct spelling'.

The present article seeks to explore some of the implications of this emphasis on writing in accordance with standard English conventions. This is not in any way to suggest that the revised National Curriculum is concerned purely with issues of grammatical conformity; rather it is an examination of what seems likely to become a more salient characteristic of English syllabuses than has hitherto been the case. In part this study, based on the written work of a sample of children in Year 11, extends an earlier article (Williamson, 1990) which examined the effect of dialect on the writing of Year 6 children and the extent to which the interference of non-standard dialect forms led to errors in writing in standard English.

### **The Present Study**

The findings reported here are based on an analysis of a piece of writing undertaken in controlled conditions by a group of 23 Year 11 pupils from an inner city comprehensive school on Tyneside. The sample was taken from the entire ability range, their final General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) marks ranging from A to G. The writing was produced in response to a range of essay titles, most pupils either writing about a first opportunity to show they were grown up or about their first day at work.

I have examined these passages purely in terms of the extent to which they conform to the conventions of usage in standard written English. This is not by any means to suggest that there are no other factors of importance that might be taken into consideration when making a response to these essays. There were clear differences, among other things, in the pupils' ability to hold a reader's interest, their sense of structure in writing a narrative and their ability to make reasonable inferences about the reader's understanding of what is being written about. There is no intention to devalue such qualities—they are simply not the focus of the present study.

It should also be noted that the issue of what constitutes standard English is not entirely a simple one, particularly in relation to punctuation, where I have followed the practice of giving the benefit of the doubt in cases which I regarded as being examples of divided usage. Where I had doubts about points of



TABLE I. Frequency of errors

Pupil	Length of piece in words	Number of words per error	Pupil	Length of piece in words	Number of words per error
1	822	28.3	13	789	19.7
2	340	7.5	14	723	20.1
3	531	23.1	15	613	11.8
4	238	11.9	16	498	10.8
5	316	19.8	17	389	8.1
6	642	19.45	18	550	6.3
7	325	6.25	19	674	15.7
8	223	9.7	20	750	9.5
9	490	7.3	21	33	8.3
10	307	18.0	22	197	19.7
11	386	8.4	23	461	14.4
12	759	11.0			

grammatical usage, I have used Quirk & Greenbaum (1973) to confirm my own intuitions. In general, the incidence of doubtful cases was small enough to feel confident that they made no significant difference to the findings reported here.

The findings were analysed in respect of six categories: spelling; punctuation; other orthographic features (including misuse of apostrophes, incorrect segmentation into words, inappropriate use of capital letters and of hyphens); grammar; use of non-standard dialect lexis; and omissions.

## Findings

### *General*

Taken overall, there were considerable variations in the performance of the pupils on this task. Table I shows the length of each piece and the incidence of error, which is measured in the number of words per error; the higher the score the more closely the writer has conformed to standard English usage. As might be expected, there is considerable variation both in length of piece and in the incidence of errors: the more competent writers are functioning at a level of around one error every 20 words, whereas at the other end of the spectrum the rate of errors is more than twice as high. Similarly, even if one excludes pupil 21, whose piece is much shorter than any of the others, the most prolific write about three to four times as much as those who have produced least.

Compared with my study of 11 year-olds (Williamson, 1990, p. 253) we find a much higher length of piece and a much lower incidence of error. The Year 11 pupils average 480 words in these essays compared with 266 for the younger group, who averaged an error every 8.9 words compared with one every 13.7 in the present study. This is as might be predicted but leaves open the question of whether there has been any change in the pattern of error.



TABLE II. Percentage of errors accounted for by spelling, punctuation and other orthographic features

Pupil	%	Pupil	%
1	68.0	13	80.0
2	77.7	14	82.7
3	73.9	15	84.7
4	40.0	16	86.9
5	62.5	17	87.5
6	54.6	18	80.8
7	80.8	19	63.6
8	95.6	20	79.7
9	85.9	21	100.0
10	35.3	22	80.0
11	86.9	23	81.9
12	85.4		

*Spelling, Punctuation and other Orthographic Features*

In the earlier study, a very high proportion of the errors related to features of the writing system which had been inadequately mastered by the young writers. Table II sets out the findings for the sample under consideration here. It is clear from Table II that these categories account for a very high proportion (just over three-quarters) of the errors in these pieces of writing. Individually, only five pupils have less than two-thirds of their mistakes accounted for while twice as many score 80% or more.

As a proportion, there is a remarkable consistency between the findings for the junior children, who made 78.5% of their errors in these categories (Williamson, 1990, p. 254), and the present sample whose score was 76.3%. While it must be acknowledged that the constant percentage represents a fall in the total score since the overall incidence of error is lower, it would still appear that spelling, punctuation and other features of the orthography are the major areas for improvement if teachers are to meet the requirements of the revised National Curriculum in English.

Of the three categories, punctuation is by far the most significant, accounting for 38.4% of all errors, with spelling being responsible for 24.9% and other orthographic features 13.0%. Even if one sets spelling aside and accepts the Cox Report's view that we cannot aim for perfect spelling because 'there are too many words in English that can catch out even the best speller' (DES, 1989, 17.33), work on the mechanics of punctuation, apostrophes, capitalisation and so on could halve the number of errors found in these pieces of work. The question of whether time given to that would be time well spent is a very pertinent one at the present time.

### *Grammatical Features*

The use of non-standard grammatical features accounts for the next highest category of error, amounting to 13.3% of the total. Again, this percentage is noticeably similar to the 10% figure yielded in the study of 11 year-olds. As noted in Williamson (1990, p. 256), it is by no means a simple matter to decide with confidence when a non-standard feature arises from the influence of another dialect and when there is another cause. To support my own intuitions as a resident of Tyneside for over a quarter of a century, I have used a short grammar of Tyneside English written by Beal (1989) which has been invaluable, although it cannot hope to compare in scope or detail with the major studies which have been made of standard English.

### *The Verb Phrase*

Nearly half of all grammatical mistakes arise from problems with verb forms and usages, about a third of which involve the use of non-standard forms of the past tense or past participle ('I was waken by the sound of the birds', 'Mark had help him a few times before', 'I slided' and so on). About half of these are Tyneside dialect forms; the following are cited in Beal (p. 5): 'done' is used as a past tense form on three occasions, 'took' is used as a past tense twice and there are single instances of Tyneside uses of 'give', 'forgot', beat, 'came' and 'come'. There are two further cases which present some difficulty: 'The manhood of doing a paper round had wore off' and '... without getting threw off'. Though neither of these past participles are among those cited by Beal as being Tyneside in origin, her list does not claim to be exclusive and it is possible that these forms are regional in origin. At most, 12 of the non-standard verb forms discussed here may be attributable to the influence of the local dialect. Of the nine remaining non-standard past tense and past participle forms, six seem attributable to simple lapses in which the relevant marker has merely been omitted ('waken[ed], use[d] [twice], help[ed], step[ped]' and 'like[d]'). The remainder form a somewhat disparate group; one seems to be an example of an original formation—'I had to be babysat'—and two appear to be one-off errors ('awoke' for 'awakened' and 'slided' for 'slid').

None of the other instances of non-standard usage in the verb phrase is attributable to the influence of Tyneside dialect. The next commonest group consisted of the use of the present tense where the context demanded the past or vice versa; the 12 instances of this are clearly not dialect-related but simply reflect a failure to maintain the patterns expected in written language. The same is true of the smaller number of instances of failure to ensure that subject and verb match each other in number; four of the five examples consist of 'There was' followed by a plural complement, a construction which may reflect spoken usage or a failure to plan sentence structure in advance; Cheshire *et al.* (1993, p. 64) offer evidence that 'there was' followed by a plural is a widespread feature of British English and not simply a feature of any particular dialect. The only



other significant source of error lay in the use of relatively complex verb phrases, often indicating some uncertainty over the expression, in writing, of concepts such as conditionality or aspect; so we find 'Finally it had arrived' where the context demands simply 'arrived' or 'soon there will be some more' where we would expect 'would' for 'will'.

### *The Noun Phrase*

Far fewer non-standard forms were found in the noun phrase. On five occasions the plural marker was omitted; three of these (two by the same writer) look like simple slips but one, 'for the first nine mile' is an example of a usage which is widespread on Tyneside (and in other areas, as well as on motorway signs). The other is an instance of 'pound' used as a plural ('up to seventy pound') which occurred more frequently in the samples of junior pupils' writing (probably because of their subject matter). There is one instance of the Tyneside plural 'teas', in '[I] made the teas'.

The commonest Tyneside form to be found in the noun phrase was the use of objective pronouns in compound subjects; Beal (p. 16) notes that this is a feature both of Tyneside and of other non-standard dialects. There are seven instances of this in the sample, such as 'me and my brother', 'her and my dad' and 'me and five other people'. There is one related example, 'I and another few paper boys' which may reflect a partial move to standard English in that the form 'I' is preferred to 'me' but the shift of the first person pronoun to the second position in the phrase has not taken place.

There is one instance of the influence of Tyneside dialect on the choice of a relative pronoun: 'Mrs Gray (which is the person ...)'. Beal (p. 17) notes that 'This use of *which* is [also] found in other non-standard dialects, and may be a hypercorrect form, arising from a feeling that *which* is superior to the more informal *that*'.

The only other problem in the noun phrase is one instance of 'the' being used when 'a' would be expected to indicate the first mention of, in this instance, a picture of Kevin Keegan. The failure to follow the rule that 'The definite article presupposes an earlier mention of the item' which it determines (Quirk & Greenbaum, 1973, p. 72) was a much commoner feature of Williamson's (1990, p. 258) study of the writing of 11 year-olds where it occurred seven times in a rather smaller sample than is examined here.

### *The Adverbial Phrase*

There is one non-standard adverbial usage: 'I was able to get this job reasonably easy' where one might expect the form 'easily'. This illustrates the difficulty of deciding on the nature of these usages. I wondered if this might be a Tyneside form although it is not cited in Beal, and Miller (1993, p. 108) claims that not adding *-ly* to adjectives to form adverbs is a feature of 'all non-standard varieties of English'. The use of 'easy' as an adverb is, indeed, cited by the *Oxford English*



*Dictionary* as colloquial rather than dialectal; on the other hand, it is not clear whether their analysis is restricted to a relatively limited number of usages such as 'take it easy' and 'stand easy'. It is also possible that a relatively inconfident writer may have been influenced by the preceding 'reasonably' into feeling that another '-ly' was superfluous. On balance, it seems reasonable to assume that this is not a specifically Tyneside dialect feature.

### *Grammar Summary*

In all, there were 126 non-standard grammatical usages, which represent just over 13% of the errors in these pieces of writing. This forms a slightly higher proportion than the 10% of the junior school sample recorded in Williamson (1990, p. 258) but still makes a relatively minor contribution to the overall picture. Of the 126, no more than 25, or 20%, can be attributed to the influence of the local dialect, a figure which is once again very close to that for the younger pupils for whom the corresponding figure is just under 25%. Viewed globally, the non-standard dialect grammatical features in the present study account for 3% of the total number of non-standard usages in the sample, the same figure as for the juniors (Williamson, 1990, p. 258). In both cases one must conclude that non-standard dialect forms are not a major cause of difficulty in writing.

There is no very clear pattern in the non-dialect grammatical errors and it is not the purpose of this study to examine these in detail, but the commonest range of errors arises from difficulty in handling subordination, a feature which is typically both more prevalent and more sophisticated in writing than in speech. This, and the frequency of what appear to be simple slips ('to spend a for myself, 'the hole on my gloves' and so on) suggests that even at this age some pupils are still having difficulty with the written form as an alternative means of expression to speech, although one noticeable difference between these writers and those studied in Williamson (1990) is the virtually total absence of relatively large-scale structural breakdowns which were a feature of the younger pupils' writing.

In conclusion, I can do no better than reiterate my earlier findings that, 'On the basis of these samples, it is clear that grammar is a relatively minor aspect of the business of writing in accordance with the conventions of Standard English usage and that the interference of non-standard dialect grammatical patterns is a relatively minor aspect of the business of writing in Standard English grammar' (Williamson, 1990, p. 258).

### *Lexical Features*

By far the commonest influence of Tyneside English on these pieces of writing is shown in the use, on eight occasions, of 'mam' for 'mother'. Other forms such as 'dad', 'granny' and 'grandma' which we might not expect in formal standard English writing seem so widespread in usage as to be regarded as colloquial



rather than dialectal and to reflect an insensitivity to register rather than the interference of a local form.

There is a group of examples of Tyneside constructions which use 'of' or 'off' in non-standard ways; thus we read of receiving 'respect off the President', of getting 'money off people' and having a sum 'deducted off' one's wages, in all of which cases 'from' might seem more appropriate in standard English; we also find 'told of' where we would expect 'by', 'I called of him' ('to') and 'I fell off of my bike'.

The only other recurring feature of Tyneside lexis consists of three occurrences of the preposition 'on' preceding a time expression: 'To deliver newspapers on a morning and on an evening'. This is a characteristically Tyneside expression, although it should be noted that all three examples come from the same writer.

All the remaining Tyneside lexical features occur only once: we have 'took bad' (became ill); 'I have been learned' (taught); 'Newcastle were playing good' (well); 'getting wrong' (being upbraided); 'I could get another lay on' (advance on pocket money); 'cush' (good); 'I paid in' (paid for admission); 'sniff' (aerosol or other material for volatile substance abuse). Once again, it must be emphasised that to a large extent I must rely on my own knowledge of Tyneside lexis for my ascription of these lexical items to the local dialect; some may be arguable—I cannot be sure, for example, that 'sniff' is a regional term rather than one with widespread currency in a youth culture to which I do not subscribe. Be that as it may, the number of terms about which there is such doubt is so limited and, as we shall see below, forms such a small part of the overall picture that there is no danger of distorting the findings reported here.

As was the case with grammar, it is clear that relatively few of the errors in these passages can be ascribed to the influence of Tyneside dialect. The forms discussed here account for only 3% of the errors in these pieces; for once this is a substantially different proportion from the case for the junior pupils, whose use of dialect lexis represented only 1% of the total of non-standard forms, but it still represents an extremely small part of the overall pattern.

## Conclusion

It would be well to begin with two caveats: first, the sample studied here is relatively small, although the findings are very similar to those in my earlier study, and are consistent with the findings of Winch (1994) whose study of children in the Caribbean leads him to comment on 'The absence of any clear evidence of creole interference in children's writing in the St Lucian primary schools'. Next, as has already been suggested, the analysis of these samples is by no means a simple matter, because of the lack of comprehensive and authoritative sources of information on non-standard dialects. However, the figures given here for Tyneside usages have been based on the principle that, wherever there seemed to be any doubt, forms have been categorised as regional so that, if anything, the figures overstate that influence. Further, the incidence of such



forms is so slight that analysis of the data by another researcher would be unlikely radically to alter the conclusions drawn here.

It is clear that, even at this stage in their education, students are still experiencing some difficulty in coming to terms with the complexity of the writing system. However, the preponderance of their errors is accounted for in those aspects of the system which have no equivalent in speech; spelling, orthographical conventions and, particularly, punctuation are the sources of the great majority of errors in writing. Since these have no parallel in speech, their incidence clearly cannot be attributed to the influence of non-standard dialect. While it is true that some of the spelling errors may reflect an attempt to render phonically the writer's pronunciation of the words in question, it should be noted both that this is a matter of accent rather than dialect and that such errors can hold for any accent, including Received Pronunciation, since the English spelling system does not offer a phonetically consistent rendering of any sound system.

The Tyneside dialect features found here account for about 6% of the total of non-standard forms, these being evenly divided between grammatical and lexical items. It is clear, if writing 'correctly' is to be taken as an important aim of our education system and in particular of the English curriculum, that concentration on teaching students to avoid non-standard dialect forms can have only a minimal effect on the overall incidence of error.

One of the most striking features of the present study has been the similarity between the findings here and those in my earlier study of junior school children (Williamson, 1990). While the incidence of error has decreased substantially, as one would both expect and hope, the relative incidence of Tyneside forms has stayed remarkably constant. This may reflect a relative lack of concern with attempting to eradicate Tyneside forms in writing, although my knowledge of the comprehensive school from which the sample was drawn makes me doubt this. What seems to me more probable is that, although non-standard dialect forms constitute a relatively minor factor in writing, there may persist a core of such forms which is very difficult to eradicate entirely, partly perhaps because it is impossible for a teacher to draw attention to the entire range of 'inappropriate' usage and partly because such forms are such an ingrained part of children's speech patterns that they will tend to recur in their writing.

The issue of the weight which should be given to the development of pupils' ability to write in accordance with the conventions of standard English is one which, in the light of official pronouncements, including those outlined in the introduction to this study, must be debated widely; this debate has already assumed a prominence which means that it must inevitably be carried on in all English departments which operate within the framework of the National Curriculum. It is important that, as far as possible, arguments are based on factual evidence rather than merely consisting of the reiteration of entrenched points of view. The present study has sought to look objectively at one factor which many of the participants in the national debate have claimed is highly



relevant, the influence of non-standard dialect on writing performance; our conclusion must be that teachers can find much more profitable channels for their energies than trying to correct such forms.

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Those Terrible Marks of the Beast: non-standard dialect  
and children's writing

John Williamson and Frank Hardman

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# Those Terrible Marks of the Beast: Non-standard Dialect and Children's Writing

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The greater emphasis on standard English in the 1995 version of English in the National Curriculum in England has meant that it has become more important than ever to understand the relationship between non-standard dialects and standard English. This study (funded by an ESRC grant) examines a range of writing tasks from 11 and 15 year old pupils from four regions of England to establish the relative importance of non-standard dialect as a factor in deviation from standard English norms in writing. The findings were related to those of Hudson & Holmes (1995) on the influence of non-standard dialect on spoken language. It was found that the use of non-standard dialect was a relatively rare phenomenon and one which shrinks into insignificance when compared with, for example, errors of spelling or punctuation. While gender and regional origin seemed to have little influence on the frequency of non-standard dialect, the task in hand did seem to have an effect, particularly with the younger pupils.

## Introduction

'Dialect words', comments Thomas Hardy, are 'those terrible marks of the beast to the truly genteel'. It might seem that little has changed in the last century for there can be few aspects of education which have given rise to more controversy in recent years than the issue of the use of standard English in speech and writing as against the use of non-standard dialects. The most recent outburst in the press came in the autumn of 1995 when Gillian Shepherd, Secretary of State for Education and Employment, launched a campaign to put an end to a situation in which the education system allegedly produces school leavers capable only of 'communication by grunt'. (*Sunday Express*, 24.9.95). In the words of another tabloid, 'War has been declared on sloppy standards in written and spoken English in schools' through Mrs. Shepherd's announcement that 'Our young people must leave school able to speak clearly and effectively in standard English' (*Daily Mail*, 12.10.95).

Reports in these, and other news media (see, for instance, *The Observer* of 1.10.95 and 15.10.95 and *The Sunday Times* of 15.10.95), reflect a concern with standard English which first found official expression in *English in the National Curriculum* (DES, 1990) where it is envisaged that pupils, from the age of about 11, should be able to 'begin to use the structures of written Standard English' (p. 13). This follows on from the report of the Cox Committee, which formed the basis of the 1990 National Curriculum in English, that 'all pupils should learn, and if necessary be explicitly taught, Standard English' (DES, 1989, section 4.4). This concern with standard English was taken much farther in the revised National Curriculum for English (DFE, 1995) in which 'Standard English and

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Language Study' appear as a separate component in each of the three programmes of study (speaking and listening, reading and writing) at each of the Key Stages in the pupil's development (from 5 to 7 years of age, from 7 to 11 and, for English, from 11 to 16.) This is intended to facilitate the implementation of the 'general requirement' that 'pupils need to be able to speak, write and read standard English fluently and accurately' (DFE 1995: 2).

This emphasis begs several questions. First, it seems to be based on the assumption that standard English is a clearly definable, discrete linguistic system; that the first of these propositions is questionable is, interestingly, illustrated by the shift from 'Standard English' in the earlier documents quoted in the previous paragraph to 'standard English' in the 1995 Curriculum. We cannot neatly separate standard English forms from other forms of the language; as Cheshire and Milroy (1993: 26) argue, in questioning the views of the Cox Committee on this subject, 'variation in language is part of a well-organised and structured language system, occurring in specific linguistic contexts ... Since structured variation of this kind is unconscious it is likely to be beyond our conscious control, and therefore it is naive in the extreme to suppose that children could be taught to readily substitute one form for another'. The revised National Curriculum is, arguably, even more naive in its approach to the relationship between the elements of the pupil's linguistic repertoire when, again in the General Requirements, it stipulates that 'The richness of dialects and other languages can make an important contribution to pupils' knowledge and understanding of standard English' (DFE, 1995: 2). Given the weighty emphasis placed on the development of competence in standard English in all three profile components at all key stages, it seems at best optimistic, and at worse disingenuous, to expect teachers to operationalise the view just cited. The DFE statement is naive also in apparently overestimating teachers' awareness of the difficulty of defining standard English and coming to an understanding of the relationship between standard and non-standard forms. The work of Cheshire (1982) and Williams (1989) clearly shows that teachers in Reading, Berkshire had neither a clear concept of that relationship nor a 'consistent policy for dealing with non-standard features that occurred in the children's work' (Williams, 1989: 194).

There are, then, doubts about the validity of the very basis of the National Curriculum in relation to standard English and non-standard dialects but the question which we wish to raise in this article is a more empirical one: in relation to writing, is there a pressing need for teachers to concentrate on non-standard dialect as a factor which prevents children from using standard English. An important recent study by Hudson & Holmes (1995) has examined the position with regard to the prevalence of non-standard dialect in spoken English, based on an examination of data from an archive produced by the Assessment of Performance Unit in 1988, just prior to the inauguration of the National Curriculum in English. Hudson & Holmes report (p. 16) that '68% of the sample use some [non-standard English] in our rather formal texts'.

Our study has taken the same corpus as a basis but has looked at the written, rather than the spoken, material to establish whether a comparable effect would be found when children write. This is an important question because teachers

have a finite amount of time at their disposal and we need to know whether a substantial amount of that time needs to be devoted to the task of moving their pupils away from non-standard towards standard forms. Small scale studies based on pupils from a limited geographical area have been undertaken in the past (see, for example, Cheshire, 1982; Williams, 1989; Williamson, 1990, 1995; Winch & Gingell, 1994) but the influence of non-standard dialects is a national concern and we have here undertaken a study which is broadly based geographically, and which can yield information on the effects of such variables as age and gender on the use of non-standard dialect on writing.

## The Present Study

### The sample

The study was based on an analysis of writing obtained from the APU survey of 1988. This corpus of material was chosen for three reasons: the samples 'were part of a carefully planned national survey, so they should be reasonably representative' (Hudson & Holmes, 1995: 5); they were gathered just before the implementation of the National Curriculum in English and so should give baseline figures for the incidence of non-standard dialect on writing before there was an official policy on the teaching of standard English; finally, the APU corpus provided the samples for Hudson & Holmes' (1995) examination of children's use of spoken standard English and examining the writing of a parallel sample would make it possible to compare the incidence of non-standard dialect in writing with that in speech.

We have not been able to make an analysis of one variable which is clearly relevant to the study of non-standard English: the influence of social class. The position of the APU is most clearly stated in Gorman *et al.*, (1983: 3): 'It is not the intention [of the APU] to produce information about the performance of individual children, individual schools or individual local education authority areas. The amount of information about pupils or schools available to the monitoring teams is therefore strictly limited'. What we can be sure of is that the surveys were based on a 'randomly selected' sample of schools 'according to background variables such as region, location and school type' (Gorman *et al.*, 1988: 10). There was a mixture of pupils from different socio-economic backgrounds, as measured by the 'number of pupils receiving free meals as a percentage of the total number of pupils on the school roll on a given date' (Gorman *et al.*, 1988: 192) and of pupils from metropolitan or non-metropolitan counties. Our own sample comprises 83% of the children assessed by the APU in the four regions we studied and so it is reasonable to assume that we have a good cross-section of the school population.

In order to make a valid comparison, we examined scripts from the same dialect areas as Hudson and Holmes: Merseyside, Tyneside, the South-west and London. The APU survey examined 11-year-olds and 15-year-olds and we aimed for a sample of 50 scripts from each age range in each area; because of difficulties with the quality of photocopying, the final sample consisted of 362 scripts.

Table 1 Regional and age distribution of the sample

	<i>Merseyside</i>	Tyneside	<i>South-west</i>	<i>London</i>
11-year-olds	48	50	50	49
15-year-olds	43	42	38	42

### The Writing Tasks

The APU survey was based on a sample of primary school children aged 11 and a sample of secondary school children aged 15; there is some overlap between the tasks for each group but, as would be expected, there are substantial differences between them. It will be seen that the range of writing tasks is commendably wide and offers variation in purpose, audience, subject matter and genre.

#### The primary sample

The first task was a 'short expository' one 'in which pupils were required to comment on a rule which applied to some field of activity or context they were familiar with; the task was structured so that they first explained the nature and scope of their chosen rule, then gave reasons either justifying or criticising it' (Gorman *et al.*, 1989: 12). The second task 'took the form of a personal anecdote: the pupil's earliest memory. Pupils were asked to write about the first thing they could remember from their childhood — an event, a person, a favourite toy or object' (Gorman *et al.*, 1989: 12). Task 3 involved the pupils reading an A3 sheet of information about squirrels which was accompanied by sketches; the pupils were required to rewrite the text as a shorter leaflet for younger readers. This task 'investigated two aspects of writing competence: ability to summarise selectively, and ability to direct information to a particular readership' (Gorman *et al.*, 1989: 13). The fourth task was based on a picture which was presented to the pupils as the starting point for a story. In order to encourage narrative rather than description of the picture the pupils were given 'questions concerning setting, characters, events and outcomes' (Gorman *et al.*, 1989: 12). Task 5 involved 'reviewing a comic or magazine of the pupil's own choice, with the aim of convincing a classmate that it was or was not a good read' (Gorman *et al.*, 1989: 13). The final task 'was based on a practical science investigation ... The question posed was how to find out the relative warmth of two materials, given certain weather conditions. A short list of potential equipment was sketched in the pupils' booklet, with some suggestions as to its use' (Gorman *et al.*, 1989: 13).

#### The secondary sample

The first secondary task established a link with the primary survey by using the Squirrels activity outlined above. Task 2 required of the students a 'piece of persuasive writing based on a strongly held personal opinion' (Gorman *et al.*, 1989: 13). The third task called for 'reflective' writing; the pupils were asked to read a short passage entitled 'Images of the Future' in which predictions were made about life-style changes in the year 2,000 ... The task was to select one theme ... and speculate on the possibilities for change [in that period]' (Gorman *et al.*,



1989: 14). Task 4 consisted of writing a letter of application for a summer job. The fifth task was based 'on the situation of providing information about recent learning to an outsider. As a way of exploring how pupils expressed 'in their own words' the subject content of mathematics or science, the focus was placed on these areas of the curriculum' (Gorman *et al.*, 1989: 14). The final task examined the extent to which pupils could gather information from graphs and tables and 'employ graphics in writing of their own' (Gorman *et al.*, 1989: 14). The pupils were given three charts illustrating the dangers of smoking and asked to write a broadsheet warning 11-year-olds of the consequences to health of smoking.

### Script sampling

In order to gain as representative a sample of different kinds of writing as possible, we took eight or nine examples of each task wherever we could for each age/region group. Where a given age/region group did not provide eight examples of one or more tasks we took all the examples of the tasks in question (for example, the Tyneside secondary group provided, in the whole APU survey, only four instances of Task 3, all of which were included in our sample). After applying that rule, we took the first available examples of each task. The only exception to these procedures was that, where there was a choice between balancing the number of tasks and having as many distinct pupils surveyed as possible, we chose the latter course.

### Analysis

We each undertook the analysis of half the sample with extensive cross-consultation to ensure consistency. Each of the authors has extensive experience of one of the dialect areas studied, one being a native of the North-west and the other a resident of Tyneside for nearly 30 years. Of more moment was a considerable body of scholarship on non-standard dialect (Beal, 1993; Cheshire *et al.*, 1993; Edwards, 1993; Hudson & Holmes, 1995; Hughes & Trudgill, 1991; the edited collection of Trudgill, 1984; Upton *et al.*, 1994; Wakelin, 1984; for a fuller bibliography on this topic, see Edwards *et al.*, 1984; or Glauser *et al.*, 1993). All instances of non-standard dialect which we discuss in this paper are validated by at least one of these sources. In cases of doubt we have used Quirk, Greenbaum & Svartvik (1985) as an authoritative source on what are considered to be the features of standard English.

In spite of this body of evidence on which to draw, the analysis is by no means simple. There are, first, problems of legibility; it can be difficult on occasion to be certain whether a pupil has written 'he has run' or 'he has ran'. There were surprisingly few occasions on which this kind of doubt arose. What is less quantifiable is whether a given form is an instance of non-standard dialect or simply a slip of the pen. In the absence of any opportunity to check back with the writer we have assumed that usages which conform to the appropriate non-standard dialect are indeed instances of that dialect and not simply transcriptional errors.

A more interesting issue of principle concerns the difficulty of drawing a distinction between non-standard dialect forms and colloquialisms. As Cheshire *et al.*, (1993: 83) point out, it is far from easy to apply 'the categories of standard

English and non-standard English to specific grammatical features'. Hughes & Trudgill (1991) consider, among other examples, usages such as 'come quick' (p. 20), the use of 'this' as an indefinite article in constructions like 'There's this house' (p. 21) and 'like' in sentences such as 'I was put on like a trolley' (p. 48) (example from our corpus). Whilst acknowledging the difficulty of a definite ascription, they seem to come to the view that all of these are best regarded as examples of colloquial standard English. Hudson & Holmes (1995: 19) include the first two as instances of non-standard dialect. In instances like these we have followed the practice of Hudson & Holmes (in order to compare our findings with theirs) and so have treated adverbs in adjectival form and the use of 'this' explained above as non-standard dialect whereas we have followed Hughes & Trudgill (and perhaps implicitly Hudson & Holmes) in our treatment of 'like'.

Among the commonest features which we found were the use of non-standard past tense and past participle forms; the use of a plural subject with a singular verb; the use of *is/was* after *there* when standard English would have a plural; the use of an adjective as an adverb; the use of *more* with a comparative adjective; lack of plural markers on nouns of quantity or measurement. For a full discussion of these and the other features we found, see Williamson & Hardman (forthcoming).

In general, it must be said, the analysis was relatively unproblematic and while we must acknowledge that there is some potential for alternative analyses of our data, the incidence of contentious examples is such that the broad sweep of our findings would not be affected.

## Findings

We have found, as did Hudson & Holmes (1995: 6), that there are quite wide variations in the pattern of non-standard dialect usage. Table 2 provides an overview of our findings.

## Overall

The incidence of non-standard dialect usage among writers varied from just under a quarter, in the case of Merseyside 11-year-olds, to just under a half for the 11 and 15-year-olds in Tyneside. The extent of variation is very much in line with that reported by Hudson & Holmes (1995: 6).

Table 3 shows that, as might be expected, the level of non-standard dialect usage is considerably lower in our study of written English than was the case in Hudson and Holmes' study of spoken English.

As we have suggested, the figures for written English are consistently lower than those for spoken English; the groups which show the highest incidence of non-standard dialect forms in writing, Tyneside 11-year-olds and 15-year-olds, produced fewer of these forms than the lowest spoken group, Tyneside 11-year-olds. In both studies there is quite a wide range of results: the lowest group in Hudson and Holmes work showed 56% of pupils using non-standard dialect with the highest figure being 87% (or 83% if one discounts the groups with small sample sizes); our range was from 23% to 48%. Taken overall, 127 of the children, 35% of the writing sample, used some non-standard dialect features.

Our figure of about a quarter to a half of pupils in the study using non-standard

Table 2 The incidence of non-standard dialect usage per script

Region	Age	Total scripts			% using non-standard dialect		
		male	female	all	male	female	all
Merseyside	11	34	14	48	24	21	23
	15	24	19	43	25	42	33
Tyneside	11	30	20	50	40	60	48
	15	19	23	42	47	48	48
South-west	11	29	21	50	28	24	26
	15	20	18	38	50	39	45
London	11	16	33	49	44	33	37
	15	17	25	42	29	24	26

dialect forms in writing, especially when that writing was undertaken in a formal, almost examination-like setting, may seem quite high but these figures, we would argue, need to be placed in a wider context. The following table shows how often non-standard dialect forms were used by those who used them at all.

Table 4 clearly makes the point that, although quite a large proportion of pupils use some non-standard dialect features, there tend on average to be only about 1.5 forms for each script which contains any non-standard dialect usages. Looking at the survey as a whole, there is approximately one dialect feature for every two scripts. Of the 127 children who used non-standard dialect, 89 (70%) did so on only one occasion and only 9 (7%) used more than two *different* dialect features, five of them from the Tyneside primary group. (There were 13 scripts in which exactly the same form was used more than once; these have been counted as separate occurrences in Table 3.) Finally, comparing non-standard Table 3 Percentage of scripts showing non-standard dialect features in spoken (Hudson & Holmes, 1995) and written English

Region	Age	Written English	Spoken English
Merseyside	11	23	62*
	15	33	83
Tyneside	11	48	56
	15	48	72
South-west	11	26	59
	15	45	73
London	11	37	87*
	15	26	80*

NB Figures from Hudson & Homes' study marked with an asterisk are to be 'treated especially carefully' because of small sample size (Hudson & Homes, 1995: 6)



**Table 4** Mean number of non-standard forms for each script containing non-standard forms

<i>Region</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Forms per script</i>
Merseyside	11	1.2
	15	1.6
Tyneside	11	1.8
	15	1.3
South-west	11	1.8
	15	1.5
London	11	1.5
	15	1.7

dialect with only one of the other types of deviation from standard English, one should note that there are, on average, seven spelling errors per script whereas only three children out of 362 had as many as five non-standard dialect forms; viewed from a broader perspective we would emphasise our figure of around 0.5 non-standard dialect usages per writer. It would appear to us that although the use of non-standard dialect is rather widespread, there are very few children for whom it presents a major impediment to writing in standard English.

### Age Differences

Hudson & Holmes (1995: 10) found that age had a rather surprising effect in that the older pupils were more likely than the younger ones to use non-standard forms. Table 5 compares our findings for written English with theirs for speech.

The difference between our figures for 11 and 15-year-olds is not statistically significant, suggesting there is little difference between the age groups. However, these overall figures reveal only part of the story, focusing on the number of scripts which exhibit non-standard dialect features. Hudson and Holmes themselves suggest that one possible reason for the age-related pattern they found may be the length of the samples and this is certainly the case in our study of written English. The 11-year-olds in our study produced one non-standard dialect feature every 381 words whereas the 15-year-olds produced one only every 569 words. It seems clear to us that the figures in Table 5 and the apparent increase in the use of dialect at 15 is, at least in the case of our examination of

**Table 5** Age and the use of non-standard English by pupil

	<i>Total Sample</i>	<i>Users of NSE</i>
Spoken: 11-year-olds	188	114 = 61%
Written: 11-year olds	197	66 = 34%
Spoken: 15-year-olds	162	124 = 77%
Written: 15-year-olds	165	62 = 38%

written English, merely a function of increased length of text. (The average length of piece for the 11-year-olds was 220 words as against the 318 of the 15-year-olds.) Quite plainly, the incidence of non-standard dialect per word of written text decreases with age.

Gender

As with age differences, we found only a slight variation between groups, with girls being marginally more likely to use non-standard dialect than boys if we consider the number of scripts containing non-standard forms.

However, once again, if we look at the incidence per word, we find quite a different pattern, albeit one which is repeated at both primary and secondary level. It should be noted that the 189 scripts written by boys contained an average of 254 words, whereas the 173 scripts from girls had an average length of 276 words.

In respect of this dichotomy, our findings, which, it will be remembered, are based on the use of non-standard dialect by about one third of the pupils in each category, do not coincide with those of Hudson & Holmes who note (1995: 9) that, compared overall, more boys than girls use non-standard dialect although the difference between the genders (a 12% gap) is much greater in their study of spoken English than in ours. Given that roughly the same proportion of girls as boys produce scripts which contain non-standard dialect features, the finding that the number of usages per word is higher for girls than boys would tend to suggest that, in our survey, there is a somewhat surprising tendency for the girls who use non-standard dialect features to repeat them more often than the boys.

Table 6 Gender and non-standard dialect by script

	<i>Total Sample</i>	<i>Users of NSE</i>
Girls	173	63 = 36%
Boys	189	65 = 34%

Table 7 Gender and the frequency of occurrence of non-standard forms

<i>11-year-olds</i>	<i>Number of instances</i>	<i>Number of words</i>	<i>Words per instance</i>
Boys	52	22555	434
Girls	62	20870	337
<i>15-year-olds</i>	<i>Number of instances</i>	<i>Number of words</i>	<i>Words per instance</i>
Boys	40	25459	636
Girls	52	26932	518
<i>Overall</i>	<i>Number of instances</i>	<i>Number of words</i>	<i>Words per instance</i>
Boys	92	48014	522
Girls	114	47802	419

### Differences between tasks

In order to see whether tasks of different types had any influence on the production of non-standard English, it was again necessary to look at the incidence of non-standard dialect per running word, since the length of the pieces varied quite considerably. It is necessary in respect of this variable to consider the two age ranges dealt with completely separately since the tasks they undertook were not the same. This breakdown is based on the 34% of 11-year-olds and 38% of 15-year-olds who use non-standard dialect forms in the texts analysed.

The task which clearly stands out from the others here is Task 2, which shows a far higher incidence of non-standard dialect than any of the other tasks. It is interesting that this was the task which called for a personal anecdote, recalling the writer's earliest memory. It may well be argued that the personal nature of this activity encouraged pupils to use their native dialect more freely than in the other tasks. Task 2 apart, the activities fall into two groups, with Tasks 1, 3 and 6 falling together with a mean of 681 words per instance of non-standard dialect and tasks 4 and 5 averaging 425. It is perhaps worthy of note that all of the first group were characterised as 'expository' by the APU team (Gorman *et al.*, 1989: 12) and, further, are more impersonal than Tasks 4 (which involved writing an imaginative narrative) and 5 (which, although it was also classified as expository, required a personal response to questions about leisure reading.) It would perhaps be unwise to draw too many conclusions from these data, but there are certainly grounds for wondering whether pupils show, given the discrepancy

Table 8 Tasks and the incidence of non-standard dialect: 11-year-olds

Task	Number of instances	Number of words	Words per instance
1	4	2496	624
2	43	7089	165
3	15	10844	723
4	26	10612	408
5	17	7502	441
6	7	4882	697

Table 9 Tasks and the incidence of non-standard dialect: 15-year-olds

Task	Number of instances	Number of words	Words per instance
1	17	12881	758
2	20	11462	573
3	15	6973	465
4	6	2789	465
5	15	10863	724
6	19	7420	391



between Task 2 and the others, that they may be *capable* of writing in standard English to an even greater extent than is suggested by our overall figures.

The first point that stands out with regard to these figures is that there is a much smaller range of variation than was the case for the 11-year-olds; in the figures for the younger children, the task with the greatest incidence of non-standard forms was about four times as likely to include such forms as the least, whereas for the 15-year-olds the ratio was around two to one. It would appear that pupils become less prone to be influenced by the nature of particular tasks as they mature as writers. Nonetheless, there are still differences between the activities; the two tasks with the lowest incidence of non-standard dialect are, once again, expository, one requiring the reformulation of information about squirrels in a format suitable to seven/eight-year-olds and the other involving the exposition of material recently covered in maths or science. Interestingly the squirrel task, the only one duplicated across the two age ranges, was the least prone to non-dialect usage in each sample.

**Regional Differences**

The question to be addressed here is whether our data indicate that non-standard dialect is an issue of greater concern to teachers in some parts of the country rather than others.

There is clearly relatively little difference between the scripts from Tyneside, the South-west and London; the figure for Merseyside reflects, in particular, an extremely low incidence of non-standard dialect among the 11-year-olds from that region. The figure for Merseyside 11-year-olds is more than three times that for the same age range in Tyneside and London and more than twice that of the South-west. Merseyside is also the only region in which the 11-year-olds produced a lower incidence of non-standard dialect than the 15-year-olds. Given the relative consistency of the other figures, it may have been the case that there was a sampling irregularity among the Merseyside 11-year-olds which would explain why they stand out so markedly from the rest.

At this age range there was relatively little difference between the regions and our figures, with the exception, as noted, of Merseyside 11-year-olds would suggest that the prevalence of non-standard dialect is broadly similar in all four of the regions we have examined.

**Table 10** Regional variation in the incidence of non-standard dialect: 11-year-olds

<i>Region</i>	<i>Number of instances</i>	<i>Number of words</i>	<i>Words per instance</i>
Merseyside	15	12645	843
Tyneside	44	10804	246
South-west	23	8877	386
London	44	11099	252

Table 11 Regional variation in the incidence of non-standard dialect: 15-year-olds

Region	Number of instances	Number of words	Words per instance
Merseyside	25	15661	626
Tyneside	25	11532	461
South-west	26	11377	438
London	19	13821	724

Conclusion

We set out to investigate the incidence of non-standard dialect usage in writing in England before the introduction of the National Curriculum which brought with it a new emphasis, or at least a newly explicit emphasis, on the use of the standard language. The situation we have uncovered is a complex one. On one hand, we found that between a quarter and a half of each age group in each region was using non-standard dialect in writing. This was considerably less than the proportion for the same regions who were, according to Hudson & Holmes (1995), using non-standard English in speech where the corresponding figures ranged from 56% to over 80%.

It may seem, if pupils are to be encouraged to be 'confident in the use of formal and informal written standard English' (DFE, 1995: 24), that our figures give cause for concern but the number of pupils using non-standard dialect is only one measure which can be used. When we look at the incidence of non-standard dialect in relation to the texts overall, we find a very different picture with only one occurrence every 381 words for the 11-year-olds and every 569 words for the 15-year-olds. This makes the use of non-standard dialect a relatively rare phenomenon and one which shrinks into insignificance when compared, for example, with errors of spelling or punctuation.

It should also be remembered that the incidence of non-standard dialect per word of text decreased markedly between the ages of 11 and 15. This would suggest that even before the National Curriculum introduced an element of compulsion into the business of teaching pupils to write in standard English there was a progressive decrease in the incidence of non-standard dialect features as pupils matured. What we can not say, of course, is whether this decrease was the result of explicit teaching or simply part of a more general process of maturation. It would be interesting to replicate this study with present-day pupils, to establish whether the establishment of the National Curriculum has effected any change in the use of non-standard dialect.

While gender and regional origin did not, on the whole, seem greatly to influence the frequency of non-standard dialect, the task in hand did seem to have an effect, particularly with the younger pupils. We would take this to suggest that our overall figures may underestimate the pupils' linguistic repertoire in that some of those who use non-standard features may also, given a different task, be capable of writing exclusively in standard English.

To return to our quotation from Hardy, non-standard dialect is not a terrible

mark of the beast. There always were those who valued it and there is, hopefully, a growing awareness that pupils' native dialect is 'an intimate part of [their] individual and social identity' (DES, 1989, 4.33). In particular, the present study has established grounds for believing that non-standard English is not a Cerberus barring the gate to literacy for our pupils.

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To Purify the Dialect of the Tribe: children's use  
of non-standard dialect grammar in writing

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# To Purify the Dialect of the Tribe: children's use of non-standard dialect grammar in writing

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**SUMMARY** *Teachers of children of all ages are enjoined by the National Curriculum for English to develop their pupils' ability to write in standard English. This study explores the implications of these injunctions by examining the use of non-standard dialect grammar in the writing of 362 texts written by pupils of 11 and 15 years of age. It is established that most of the forms used are found in all four of the geographical regions sampled. The grammatical features of these non-standard dialects and the frequency with which they occur are itemised and compared with a study of spoken English based on the same corpus. There is found to be considerable overlap between these and other recent study of non-standard dialects in schools, although non-standard dialects are used more widely in speech than in writing.*

## Introduction

The revised National Curriculum in English places considerable emphasis on the development of written standard English across the age range to which it refers. At Key Stage 1 'pupils should be introduced to the vocabulary, grammar and structures of written standard English' (Department for Education, 1995, p. 10), at Key Stage 2 '[Pupils] should be given opportunities to consider how written standard English varies in degrees of formality' (Department for Education, 1995, p. 16) and in Key Stages 3 and 4 they 'should be encouraged to be confident in the use of formal and informal written standard English' (Department for Education, 1995, p. 24). This represents a major step from the earlier National Curriculum in which the first injunction concerning written standard English came at level 4 (the position of a typical pupil at the end of Key Stage 2) where pupils were only expected to be able to 'begin to use the structures of written standard English' (Department of Education and Science, 1990, p. 13).

Given this increased emphasis on writing in standard English, there is a pressing need for some analysis of what this means in linguistic terms. We set out here to discover what are the linguistic features of non-standard dialect which might be seen as standing in the way of pupils producing standard English texts.

We use as points of reference two recent studies which, although parallel to the work described here, are different from our study in important ways. The more recent of these is Hudson & Holmes' (1995) study of children's use of non-standard dialect in speech. Their study is based on an analysis of spoken texts produced as part of the Assessment of Performance Unit's (APU's) study of spoken English undertaken in 1988 (Gorman *et al.*, 1989). As will be seen below, our study of non-standard dialect in writing uses the same sampling base Hudson & Holmes' (1995) study of spoken English so that a direct comparison of the findings of the two studies is possible. The other study, the Survey of British Dialect Grammar (SBDG) (Cheshire & Edwards, 1993; Cheshire *et al.*, 1993), was based on a questionnaire containing 196 items, which was completed by pupils in 87 schools across the country. Each form of study has its advantages. The questionnaire affords a breadth of coverage of linguistic features which text-based studies cannot hope to emulate unless the sample size is extremely large, beyond the compass of Hudson & Holmes (1995) or ourselves. On the other hand, an examination of language in use means that we can ascertain what pupils do say or write rather than what they think they might use and we should be able to determine with some accuracy which features are in most common use.

We were also concerned with determining whether the dialect forms used in different parts of the country were distinct or whether a process of dialect levelling was taking place. Cheshire *et al.* (1993) noted that 'Some writers have suggested that as a result [of the growth of cities] dialect diversity in Britain is reducing and being replaced not by the grammatical forms of standard English but by a development towards a levelled non-standard dialect' (p. 53).

## **The Present Study**

### *The Sample*

The study was based on an analysis of writing obtained from the APU survey of 1988. This corpus of material was chosen for three reasons: the samples 'were part of a carefully planned national survey, so they should be reasonably representative' (Hudson & Holmes, 1995, p. 5), they were gathered just before the implementation of the National Curriculum in English and so should give baseline figures for the incidence of non-standard dialect in writing before there was an official policy on the teaching of standard English and, finally, the APU corpus provided the samples for Hudson & Holmes' (1995) examination of children's use of spoken standard English and examining the writing of a parallel sample would make it possible to compare the incidence of non-standard dialect in writing with that in speech.

In order to make that comparison, we examined scripts from the same dialect areas as Hudson & Holmes (1995): Merseyside, Tyneside, the south-west and London. The APU survey examined 11 and 15 year olds and we aimed for a sample of 50 scripts from each age range in each area; because of difficulties with the quality of photocopying, the final sample consisted of 362 scripts.



TABLE I. Regional and age distribution of the sample

	Merseyside	Tyneside	South-west	London
11 year olds	48	50	50	49
15 year olds	43	42	38	42

### *The Writing Tasks*

The APU survey was based on six tasks at each age level; there is some overlap between the tasks for each group but, as would be expected, there are substantial differences between them. It will be seen that the range of writing tasks is commendably wide and offers variation in the purpose, audience, subject matter and genre.

### *The Primary Sample*

The first task was a 'short expository' one 'in which pupils were required to comment on a rule which applied to some field of activity or context they were familiar with; the task was structured so that they first explained the nature and scope of their chosen rule, then gave reasons either justifying or criticising it' (Gorman *et al.*, 1989, p. 12). the second task 'took the form of a personal anecdote: the pupil's earliest memory. Pupils were asked to write about the first thing they could remember from their childhood—an event, a person, a favourite toy or object' (Gorman *et al.*, 1989, p. 12). Task 3 involved the pupils reading an A3 sheet of information about squirrels which was accompanied by sketches; the pupils were required to rewrite the text as a shorter leaflet for younger readers. This task 'investigated two aspects of writing competence: ability to summaries selectively, and ability to direct information to a particular readership' (Gorman *et al.*, 1989, p. 13). The fourth task was based on a picture which was presented to the pupils as the starting point for a story. In order to encourage narrative rather than a description of the picture the pupils were given 'questions concerning setting, characters, events and outcomes' (Gorman *et al.*, 1989, p. 12). Task 5 involved 'reviewing a comic or magazine of the pupil's own choice, with the aim of convincing a classmate that it was or was not a good read' (Gorman *et al.*, 1989, p. 13). The final task 'was based on a practical science investigation ... The question posed was how to find out the relative warmth of two materials, given certain weather conditions. A short list of potential equipment was sketched in the pupils' booklet, with some suggestions as to its use' (Gorman *et al.*, 1989, p. 13).

### *The Secondary Sample*

The first secondary task established a link with the primary survey by using the squirrels activity outlined above. Task 2 required of the students a 'piece of persuasive writing based on a strongly held personal opinion' (Gorman *et al.*,

1989, p. 13). The third task called for 'reflective' writing; the pupils were asked to read a short passage entitled 'Images of the Future' in which predictions were made about life-style changes in the year 2000 ... The task was to select one theme ... and speculate on the possibilities for change [in that period]' (Gorman *et al.*, 1989, p. 14). Task 4 consisted of writing a letter of application for a summer job. The fifth task was based 'on the situation of providing information about recent learning to an outsider. As a way of exploring how pupils expressed "in their own words" the subject content of mathematics or science, the focus was placed on these areas of the curriculum' (Gorman *et al.*, 1989, p. 14). The final task examined the extent to which pupils could gather information from graphs and tables and 'employ graphics in writing of their own' (Gorman *et al.*, 1989, p. 14). The pupils were given three charts illustrating the dangers of smoking and asked to write a broadsheet warning 11 year olds of the consequences of smoking to health.

### *Script Sampling*

In order to gain as representative a sample of different kinds of writing as possible, we took eight or nine examples of each task wherever we could for each age/region group. Where a given age/region group did not provide eight examples of one or more tasks we took all the examples of the tasks in question (for example, in the whole APU survey, the Tyneside secondary group provided only four instances of task 3, all of which were included in our sample). After applying that rule, we took the first available examples of each task. The only exception to these procedures was that, where there was a choice between balancing the number of tasks and having as many distinct pupils surveyed as possible, we chose the latter course.

### *Analysis*

We each undertook the analysis of half the sample with extensive cross-consultation to ensure consistency. Each of the authors has extensive experience of one of the dialect areas studied, one being a native of the north-west and the other a resident of Tyneside for nearly 30 years. Of more moment was a considerable body of scholarship on non-standard dialect (Trudgill, 1984; Wakelin, 1984, Hughes & Trudgill, 1991; Beal, 1993; Cheshire *et al.*, 1993; Edwards, 1993; Upton *et al.*, 1994; Hudson & Holmes, 1995). All instances of non-standard dialect which we discuss in this paper are validated by at least one of these sources. In cases of doubt we have used Quirk *et al.* (1985) as an authoritative source on standard English.

In spite of the body of evidence on which to draw, the analysis is by no means simple. Firstly, there are problems of legibility; it can be difficult on occasion to be certain whether a pupil has written 'he has run' or 'he has ran'. There were surprisingly few occasions on which this kind of doubt arose. What is less quantifiable is whether a given form is an instance of non-standard dialect



or simply a slip of the pen. In the absence of any opportunity to check back with the writer we have assumed that usages which conform to the appropriate non-standard dialect are indeed instances of that dialect and not simply transcriptional errors.

A more interesting issue of principle concerns the distinction to be made between non-standard dialect forms and colloquialisms. Hughes & Trudgill (1991) considered, among other examples, usages such as 'come quick' (p. 20), the use of 'this' as an indefinite article in constructions such as 'There's this house' (p. 21) and 'like' in sentences such as 'I was put on like a trolley' (p. 48) (example from our corpus). Whilst acknowledging the difficulty of a definite ascription, they appeared to come to the view that all of these are best regarded as examples of colloquial standard English. Hudson & Holmes (1995, p. 19) included the first two as instances of non-standard dialect. In instances such as these, we have followed the practice of Hudson & Holmes (1995) (in order to compare our findings with theirs) and so have treated adverbs in adjectival form and the use of 'this' as explained above as non-standard dialect whereas we have followed Hughes & Trudgill (1991) (and perhaps implicitly Hudson & Holmes (1995)) in our treatment of 'like'.

In general, it must be said, the analysis was relatively simple and while we must acknowledge that there is some potential for alternative analyses of our data, the incidence of contentious examples is such that the broad sweep of our findings would not be affected.

## Findings

The commonest non-standard dialect features were, with one exception, found in all four of the areas which we studied. Table II compares our findings for writing with those of Hudson & Holmes (1995, pp. 18–19) for speech and those of the SBDG as reported in Cheshire *et al.* (1993), whose study of dialect grammar features was based, it will be remembered, on a questionnaire rather than authentic texts as was the case both with Hudson & Holmes (1995) and our own study. Cheshire *et al.* (1993, pp. 64–65) gave a list of the 13 commonest features in order of frequency which forms the basis of the final column in Table II.

The only one of the ten commonest features not found in all the regions is the use of a singular subject in conjunction with a plural verb. This was used in the south-west to such an extent that it came fifth on the overall list. Examples include 'A girl always go off', 'it go slow', 'it get damp', 'it cause you to cough' and 'this drawing show'. Wakelin (1984, p. 82) saw this as a relic of earlier verbal patterns in the south-west, whereas Upton *et al.* (1994, p. 492) cited it as a feature of Cornwall and Devon as well as being more broadly spread across the south and south midlands, areas which our study did not cover. Table II lists this feature as being found by Hudson & Holmes (1995) in London only, but this is perhaps slightly misleading in that they were talking specifically about 'he were' (p. 21) which was used by only two speakers in their study.



TABLE II. The ten most common non-standard dialect features

	Instances	Regions	Hudson & Holmes (1995)	SBDG
Irregular past tense forms	26	All	All	
Plural subject with singular verb	25	All	M, L and SW	13
Use of is/was after 'there'	20	All	All	6/7
Adjective used as adverb	18	All	All	9
Singular subject with plural verb	15	SW	L	
Irregular past participle forms	14	All	All	
'More' with comparative adjective	12	All	M	
Use of prepositions	10	All	All	
'Me' with subject noun phrase	9	All	M, L and SW	
No plural marker on nouns of quantity, measurements, etc.	8	All	T	3

M, Merseyside; SW, south-west; T, Tyneside; L, London.

In general, however, there is clear evidence in our study to suggest that dialect levelling is taking place and that there are features spread across the country which are better thought of as examples of social dialect, as indices of socioeconomic status, rather than as regional dialects.

The most common feature in our study, the use of non-standard past tense forms, was found in all areas, as was also the case in Hudson & Holmes' (1995) study. Strangely, this item does not appear in Cheshire *et al.*'s (1993) list of 13 common non-standard dialect features even though several items on their questionnaire (p. 89) gave the respondents the opportunity to mention this item. There are several possible explanations for this: perhaps the specific examples chosen for the questionnaire were not the most likely to gain a response (although two of them appear in both Hudson & Holmes' (1995) list and our own; see Table II), perhaps the respondents did not feel intuitively that they used features which are in fact part of their actual patterns of language in use or perhaps, in the welter of 196 questions, these responses did not show with the frequency they might in natural samples of language.

Closely allied with the previous feature is the use of non-standard forms of the past participle of irregular verbs. There were fewer of these examples than past tense ones in our study but this still came fifth in our list. Hudson & Holmes (1995, pp. 18–19) also found non-standard past tenses more common than past participles. Table III lists the non-standard past tenses and part participles found in our study.

Our second most common feature was the use of a plural subject with a singular verb. Hudson & Holmes (1995, p. 19) and Cheshire *et al.* (1993, pp. 65 and 71–72) discussed this feature only with reference to 'was' but we found examples such as 'squirrels eats', 'these whiskers tells', 'they stops' and 'the squirrels uses' alongside a variety of forms of the verb to be. Hudson & Holmes (1995) found no instances of this feature in their Tyneside speakers but we would suggest this is merely a vagary of sampling since we found it used by four writers from Tyneside.

TABLE III. Verbs whose past tenses and/or past participles are different in standard and non-standard English in our study

Verb	Standard English		Non-standard English	
	Past tense	Past participle	Past tense	Past participle
Arise	Arose	Arisen		Arose
Beat	Beat	Beaten		Beat
Break	Broke	Broken		Broke
Bring	Brought	Brought	Brang/brung	
Come	Came	Came	Come	Came
Do	Did	Done	Done	
Drink	Drank	Drunk		Drank
Give	Gave	Given	Give	
Go	Went	Gone		Went
Run	Ran	Run	Run	Ran
See	Saw	Seen	Seen	Saw
Take	Took	Taken		Took

The use of ‘there is’ or ‘there was’ with a following plural was found in all areas in our survey and also features in both the of the studies with which we are comparing our findings. Examples include ‘there is too many fleas’, ‘there was other comics’, ‘there is only a few’ and ‘there is boats’. Cheshire *et al.* (1993) suggested that ‘since [there is/was] appear to be very widespread indeed, we conclude that they are best seen as a stylistic feature of English, characteristic of colloquial, informal speech rather than as a non-standard feature, (p. 70). We would tend to challenge this view, partly because, with the evidence there is of dialect levelling, this feature is by no means alone in having a wide distribution and partly because our study shows quite clearly that these uses of ‘there is/was’ are quite clearly found in writing undertaken in a relatively formal context and not restricted to informal speech.

Also widespread is the use of an adjective functioning as an adverb. For example, ‘We play happy together’, ‘I fell asleep very quick’, ‘squirrels can grip very good’ and ‘it went very slow’. This appeared in all areas in both our study and Hudson & Holmes (1995, p. 19), coming ninth in Cheshire *et al.*’s (1993) list of non-standard features. Their questionnaire item focused on ‘quick’ in the context of ‘I like pasta. It cooks really quick.’ Following Hughes & Trudgill (1991), Cheshire *et al.* (1993) commented ‘Again it is impossible to distinguish between non-standard English and spoken colloquial English’ (p. 73). In addition to the point made earlier that we have now provided formal written evidence for the presence of this feature, we would like to relate the use of ‘quick’ in this manner to the range of examples we have provided (and indeed the range of examples given by Hughes & Trudgill (1991, p. 20) themselves which they treated as non-standard dialect features). Occam’s razor would surely suggest that we treat all of these, including ‘quick’, as examples of one widely spread feature of non-standard dialect.

We found the use of ‘more’ followed by a comparative adjective in all four



areas, although in Hudson and Holmes' (1995, p. 20) study the distribution was restricted to Merseyside. Examples include 'no more worse than', 'more easier', 'more heavier' and 'more safer'. Cheshire *et al.* (1993, p. 95) included items on their questionnaire to cover this usage but it appears not to have been especially common.

One category, the 'use of prepositions' is slightly different from the others in that it represents a group of distinct usages rather than a very specific grammatical feature. Hughes & Trudgill (1991) noted that 'prepositions display a large degree of variation in their usage in British dialects' (p. 20). With regard to this feature, we have treated this as an aspect of non-standard dialect, following Hughes & Trudgill (1991), Hudson & Holmes (1995, p. 19) and also Cheshire *et al.* (1993, p. 77) who noted that there is a regional distribution of non-standard prepositional usages. Two of our instances, 'out the door' and 'out the window', both from London, follow Hudson & Holmes' (1995) pattern of a use of out which 'seems to be especially common before *window, door, room* or *house*' (p. 19). Another, from Merseyside, appears to follow the same pattern: 'There was a trail of water coming out the telly.' All of these appear to be examples of Coupland's (1988) categorisation of a reduction of complex prepositions, as do 'up the woods' (London) and 'down our local school' (south-west). Like Cheshire *et al.* (1993), however, we find Coupland's (1988) generalisation rather too sweeping because we also have, from London, 'put it off of my mind', which appears to be relatable to 'knocks his hat off of his head', a construction found 'more frequently in the South of the country rather than the Midlands or the North' (Cheshire *et al.*, 1993, p. 77). Our remaining examples all come from Tyneside and are all discussed by Beal (1993, p. 211): 'steal the gold off a ship', where 'off' is used for standard English 'from', 'at hospital', where 'at' is used for 'in', referring to place, 'buy what we wanted off them', with 'off' for 'from' and 'on the weekends', where 'on' is used for 'at' in a time expression.

In common with Hudson & Holmes (1995, p. 19), we found a widespread use of 'me' in compound subjects. Examples included 'me and my family', 'me and my little cousin', 'me and my mum' and 'me and John Bell'. Even though Hudson & Holmes (1995) found no examples on Tyneside (we had only one from that region although personal observation suggests it is not an uncommon feature) they suggested that this usage 'may in fact be part of casual [Spoken Standard English] among the younger generation'. Again, our findings suggest that the usage is not confined to speech nor to 'casual' situations. Whether this is an example of variation in standard English, a view which is not consonant with our intuitions about the language or, as seems more likely to us, it has been the subject of a process of dialect levelling, there is clearly an issue here for teachers to work on if pupils are to write in formal standard English.

The last of our ten commonest categories concerns the lack of a plural marker; Hughes & Trudgill (1991) noted 'A very widespread feature indeed is that, after numerals, many nouns of measurement are not marked for plurality, in many non-standard dialects' (p. 20). It is not then surprising that this is one



TABLE IV. Other features used more than once

	Instances	Regions	Hudson & Holmes (1995)	SBDG
'What' as relative pronoun	7	All	All	4
'This' for first mention	6	SW and T	All	
'Should of'	5	L and M		2
'Which' with human antecedent	4	L and T		
'Me' for 'my'	4	T and M		
Periphrastic 'do'	2	SW		

M, Merseyside; SW, south-west; T, Tyneside; L, London.

of the features in Table II which came out highest in the SBDG survey, being the third most common form reported there; Hudson & Holmes (1995, p. 20) found it only in Tyneside. Similarly, most of our examples came from Tyne-side—'I was 19 month', '16 year of age' and so on. We found only one example in Merseyside ('in 12 year'), arguably two in the south-west ('seven foot' and 'two litter') (if we characterise 'litter' as a noun of measurement) and one, again debatable, in London ('the squirrel has two sort of nests') (if we treat 'sort' as a noun of measurement and do not consider this feature to be merely a slip of the pen). This is one of the very few categories in our study where we found difficulty in analysis of the type warned against above.

Moving beyond our first ten items, we have a group of six items used more than once in our data.

First we come to the use of 'what' as a relative pronoun where standard English would have 'who' or 'which'. This features as item 4 on Cheshire *et al.*'s (1993, p. 64) list and is eighth in Hudson & Holmes (1995, p. 19). We found seven instances of this feature, spread across all four regions studied: 'the jacket what is different' (south-west), 'a small furry animal what lives ...' (London), 'the size what you want' (Tyneside) and 'the plastic sheet what I used' (Merseyside). Cheshire *et al.* (1993, p. 68) reported that Edwards & Welten claimed that 'what' as a relative pronoun did not 'seem to occur at all in the North of England'. We found three examples in Merseyside and two in Tyneside.

The fourth most common feature in Hudson & Holmes' 1995 study was the use of 'this' of 'these', '(with a noun) to refer to a person or thing not mentioned before' (p. 19). It is debatable whether this is a dialect feature or merely an item of colloquial standard English, with Hughes & Trudgill (1991, p. 21) arguing that 'this can function as an indefinite article' but that it is a 'feature of colloquial style' rather than a dialect feature. This argument is perhaps, ultimately, unresolvable but to ensure comparability with Hudson & Holmes (1995) we have included this feature here. We found it only in the south-west and Tyneside. In the former, we have 'this doctor came in' where no doctor has been previously mentioned and 'this change' in a similar situation. In Tyneside we have similar uses: 'there was once this lady' and 'these terrible experiments'.

We have included 'should of' (for 'should have') in our study to ensure



comparability with Cheshire *et al.* (1993) although it is arguable that this is merely a feature of spelling; Hudson & Holmes (1995) of course, considering only spoken English, make no reference to this usage. 'Should of' was the second most common feature in the SBDG (Cheshire *et al.*, 1993, p. 64) and it was noted (p. 65) that it was found in 73 out of 80 schools. It was much rarer in our study, being found only five times and only in Merseyside and London.

Beal (1993) noted that '*which* may occur with a personal antecedent, whereas in Standard English it would occur only after an impersonal referent' (p. 207). We found three instances of this in the Tyneside sample ('they were only boys which ...', 'those with which he congregates' and 'students which learn'). Although neither Hudson & Holmes (1995) nor Cheshire *et al.* (1993) discussed this feature we also found one example in London: 'there are 70% of under sixteens which ...'. Edwards 1993, p. 229), in her discussion of relative pronouns, made no mention of this as a southern British dialect feature. Hughes & Trudgill (1991, p. 17) mentioned 'which' with a human antecedent as a non-standard dialect feature but did not cite specific dialect areas. It may be that this is an aspect of London dialect or it may be that the writer was lured by the percentage in their sentence into seeing this as an impersonal construction. As we have noted above, it is not always possible to be certain of the reasons why a non-standard form is used.

In both of our northern examples we found 'me' being used where Standard English would have 'my'. We have 'me dad' (Merseyside) and 'me mam and dad', 'me friend' and 'me ball' (all from Tyneside). Beal (1993, p. 205) listed this as one of a range of distinctive personal pronouns on Tyneside.

The last feature to occur more than once is, we believe, the periphrastic 'do', which was found in the south-west sample. As Wakelin (1984) noted, 'The uses of the verb *do* (in reduced or unstressed form) are extended in some south-western dialects to introduce a simple infinitive' (p. 82). There are only two instances of this in our sample. In the first, at the end of a page and a half discussing blood sports, the writer concluded a paragraph on fishing thus—'... it is then stabbed by the hook on the line as well. I do totally agree with this sport.' The second example comes from a letter applying for a job: 'I like young children and I do get on with them.' It is impossible to be certain that these are not simply emphatic uses of 'do', but there is, in our opinion, enough doubt at least to consider them as dialect features peculiar to the south-west.

Five features occurred only once in our samples. We have 'them' used as the subject in Tyneside and 'them' used as a demonstrative in the same area: 'them are ...' and 'from them diseases'. This relative rarity is somewhat surprising, at least in the case of the latter usage, since this was the commonest feature reported in the SBDG (Cheshire) *et al.*, 1993, p.64) and was found in all regions by Hudson & Holmes (1995, p. 19). The use of 'them' as the subject was not listed by Beal (1993, p. 205) as a Tyneside form but does appear in Hudson & Holmes (1995, p. 20) as a purely Tyneside example and in the Survey of English Dialects (Upton *et al.*, 1994, p. 487) as a Durham though not Northumbrian form.



Our last three examples all come from London. One of these is 'give me it', which Cheshire *et al.* (1993, pp. 73–75) discussed at some length. They were interested to see whether this relatively new structure was replacing 'give it me' across the country and constituted a case of syntactic levelling. 'Nine schools reported only the newer *give me it* construction, seven of them in South-east England' (Cheshire *et al.*, 1993, p. 74). Our evidence, limited as it is, appears to confirm this regional distribution. We also have only one example of 'stood' being used in the construction 'We saw three policeman stood ...'. Cheshire *et al.* (1993, p. 71) found 'stood' (and 'sat') used in this way in 81% of the schools in the south and 67% of the schools in the east and west Midlands and reported on earlier studies which suggested they are found in the north and west of the country. It seems reasonable to agree with them that although these usages 'once had a regional distribution, they are now becoming characteristic of a general non-standard or semi-standard variety of English' (Cheshire *et al.*, 1993, p. 71). Finally, we found only one example of the double negative ('they don't know nothing') although this was found in all areas by Hudson & Holmes (1995, p. 19). It may well be that teachers have inhibited pupils from using this in writing.

## Conclusion

We set out, *inter alia*, to determine whether the study of a written corpus would give similar results to oral (Hudson & Holmes, 1995) or questionnaire (Cheshire *et al.* 1993) data and whether there appeared to be any evidence of dialect levelling such that teachers across the country might expect to encounter similar non-standard forms. The answer to both questions is in the affirmative.

Hudson & Holmes (1995, pp. 18–21) outlined 30 features in total, of which nine were used in all four areas studied, four used in Merseyside, London and the south-west, four each restricted to London or Merseyside and nine which were exclusive to Tyneside. We found examples of all the features listed by Hudson & Holmes (1995) as being found in all areas, with six of them being ubiquitous in our study. Of the others, we found one feature in two areas and each of the remainder in one area only. Of the 21 more regionally restricted and less common features listed by Hudson & Holmes (1995), we found instances of six. From our own list of 21 non-standard features only three of those which could have been found by Hudson & Holmes (1995) ('should of' is a purely written feature) do not appear on their list. Of the 13 features listed in the SBDG (Cheshire *et al.*, 1993, pp. 64–65), 11 appear in our data, if we follow Hudson & Holmes (1995, p. 20) in treating 'sat' and 'stood' as examples of the same feature. The exceptions are 'never' as a simple negative, which also features in Hudson & Holmes' (1995, p. 20) list as occurring in London, Merseyside and the south-west and 'ain't/in't' which was found by Cheshire *et al.* (1993, p. 73) in most areas other than Scotland and, except rarely, the north of England and was found by Hudson & Holmes (1995, p. 21) only in London. Of our 21



features, all were found in at least one of the other studies and seven occurred in both.

The presence in all areas of so many of the non-standard features we found very strongly suggests a process of levelling and would imply that teachers across the country are dealing with very similar phenomena, in particular when it is borne in mind that the figure of ten out of 21 features common to all areas is a minimum in that it is possible that a larger sample would have increased this proportion.

What are the implications of this study for teachers? The decision about whether or not to focus on non-standard dialect is one which teachers must decide for themselves, partly in the light of the demands of the National Curriculum and partly in the light of the prevalence of such forms among the children they teach. We found that approximately one child in three in our sample used non-standard dialect forms but that figure will obviously vary greatly from one catchment area to another. If teachers do decide to act on our findings and, in Eliot's phrase from *Little Gidding*, 'purify the dialect of the tribe', the most profitable area to focus on would undoubtedly be the verb phrase. Non-standard verb forms accounted for more than half of our total number of instances of non-standard writing.

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Williamson, J. and Hardman, F. (1997) *Children's Use of Non-standard Dialect in Writing*, (London: SCAA)

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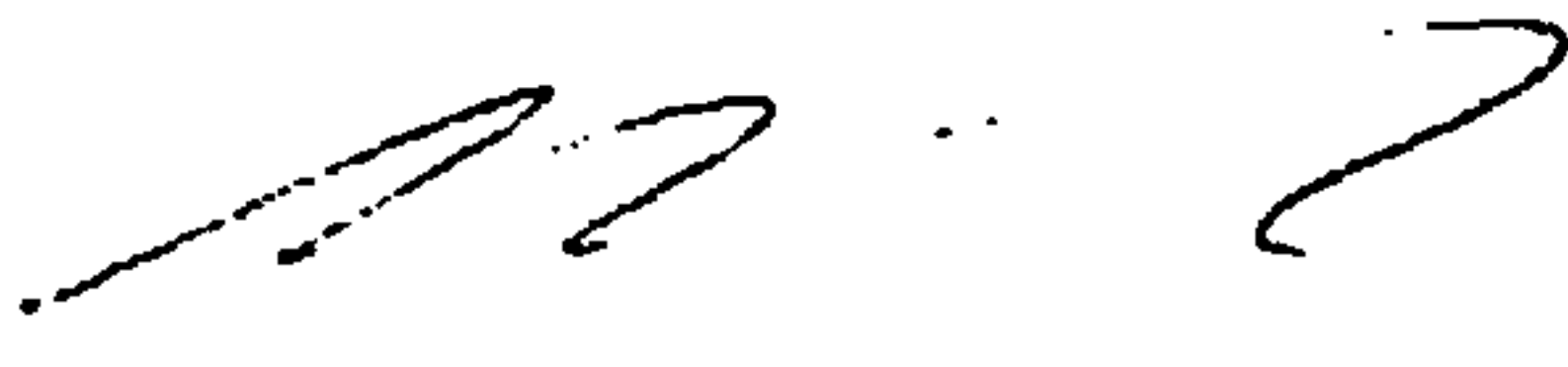
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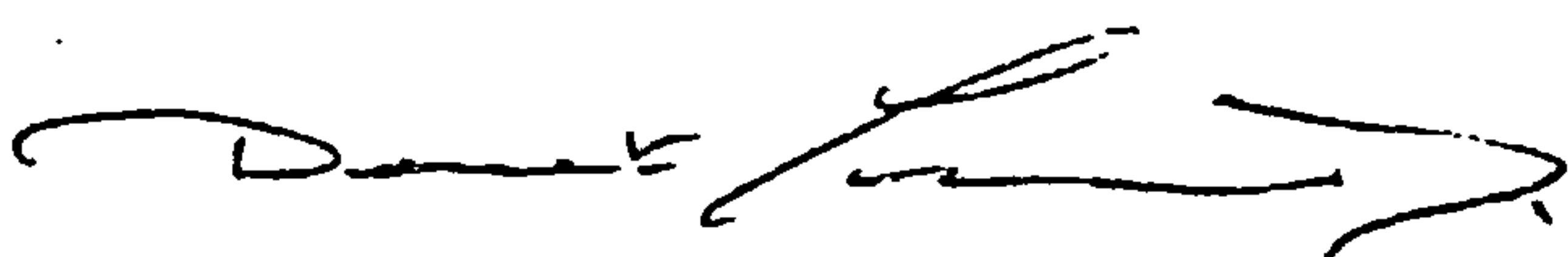
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## **Appendix 1**

**"Divven't Write That, Man": the influence of Tyneside dialect  
forms on children's free writing**

**John Williamson**

***Educational Studies* (1990), Vol 16, No 3, pp 251-260**



# “Divven’t Write That, Man”: the influence of Tyneside dialect forms on children’s free writing

JOHN WILLIAMSON

*School of Education, University of Newcastle upon Tyne, St Thomas Street,  
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**SUMMARY** *The issue of the use of Standard English in writing, and the influence of non-standard dialects on pupils’ ability to write in Standard English, has gained renewed prominence with the publication of a number of reports leading up to the advent of the National Curriculum in English. This article analyses the free writing of a group of 11 year-olds in an inner-city school in Newcastle upon Tyne in terms of the extent to which it conforms to Standard English writing conventions. The influence of non-standard dialect on performance in writing has been found to be relatively minor; many of the children plainly do have difficulties, but they are more frequently related to difficulties in mastering aspects of the writing system itself than to bi-dialectalism.*

## Introduction

The issue of the use in schools of Standard English and non-standard dialects is one which has gained renewed prominence over the last two years with the reports of the Kingman Committee (1988) and the Cox Committee (1988, 1989).

The final report of the Cox Committee (1989, 4.38) argues that “there should be the beginnings of the expectation of Standard English in written work when appropriate by the age of 11”; this recommendation is embodied in Attainment Target 3, level 5, which enjoins that pupils should be able to “Write in Standard English.”

This article seeks to explore the extent to which this injunction is likely to be a source of special difficulty for teachers whose pupils are predominantly native speakers of a non-standard dialect of English. With this question in mind, I approached a school which has been sufficiently concerned with the issue of Standard English and its relationship to non-standard dialects to invite me to spend part of a training day with them exploring some of the implications of bi-dialectalism. This school is in an inner-city, working class area of Newcastle upon Tyne and I felt that no better example could be found in the city of a school population speaking with the local urban accent and dialect. Accordingly, I asked the school for samples of the children’s free writing; it transpired that the school

collected one piece of writing each term which they kept to provide evidence of their pupils' development as writers. Two such samples form the basis of the present study.

### The Present Study

The findings reported here are based on an analysis of two pieces of writing each undertaken by 28 pupils around the age of 11, which as we have seen is that mentioned by Cox as a beginning point for concern with Standard English in writing. This comprises the entire year group in the school except for two pupils, each of whom was absent on one of the days on which the samples were written.

The first piece, produced in October 1989, was a report on The World Feast, an activity designed to enhance awareness of the inequity of world-wide economic structures. The second, written in February 1990, took the form of a letter written to a local RAF station to ask them for the use of a helicopter to transport a two ton model, which the pupils had been involved in making, from the school to the Gateshead Garden Festival, three miles away.

I have examined these passages purely in terms of the extent to which they conform to the conventions of written usage in Standard English. There are several points which must be made about this at the outset. First, it is essential to bear in mind that such an exercise does not attempt to take into account a whole range of factors which are of great (probably prime) importance in making judgements about the quality of children's writing, such as clarity, originality, accuracy, appropriacy to audience and so on. This is not to undervalue such features—they are simply not the focus of this study.

Next, the work is, and essentially had to be, based on my *Sprachgefuehl*, my sense of what the conventions of written usage are, especially in respect of such features as punctuation, for which there is no authoritative source. In respect of grammar, I have used Quirk & Greenbaum (1973) to confirm my intuitions on the relatively few occasions on which I had doubts about whether or not usages conformed with Standard English patterns. It is probable that another analyst would not have entirely agreed with my categorisation, but there tends to be sufficient agreement between speakers of a language for such divergences of opinion not to be so great as to invalidate the findings.

Two more practical difficulties concern legibility and classification. There are times when it is difficult to decipher the writing and there are rather more occasions on which it is hard to know how to classify a feature. If, for instance, a child writes "Shane's group got shoot," are we to classify this as an error in spelling or in grammar? (I am loath to use the terms error and mistake in relation to what may be features of the writer's native dialect, and do not use them when a feature has been identified as belonging to Tyneside English, but complete avoidance of these terms would make more general discussion intolerably cumbersome.) In fact, the number of problems of classification like that just cited is so small as to raise no concerns about the effect on the overall findings.

The texts were analysed in respect of six categories: punctuation; spelling;

other orthographic features (including misuse of apostrophes, of capitals other than in sentence-initial positions, of hyphens, of numerals and of the £ sign as well as incorrect segmentation into words); grammar; lexis; and omissions (which were treated as a unitary category which I did not attempt to analyse further on the grounds that such an analysis would be as much psychological as linguistic and would constitute little more than guess-work on my part).

In all the figures cited in this study, the unit of frequency of incidence of a particular error is the number of children using that feature, not the total number of occurrences. It could be argued that by doing so I have obscured the overall pattern, but there is no perfect answer to this dilemma and I would contend that to count every instance of, say, a mis-spelling which chanced to recur very frequently in the writing of one child would be more likely to give a distorted picture.

## Findings

### *General*

The two tasks elicited passages of differing lengths; the first set totalled some 4816 words, the second 2911. Somewhat surprisingly, the overall incidence of errors stayed remarkably constant, although there were substantial differences both between individuals and, in some instances, between a given child's performance on the two tasks.

Table I shows the total frequency of errors in the samples. Each child has been allocated a number; the letter A refers to the first passage, B to the second. So, let us say, Jane's piece on the World Feast is A1 and her letter to the RAF is B1.

Overall, there is an error every 8.1 words on the first task and every 9.6 on the second task. This suggestion of consistency between the two pieces is reinforced by Fig. 1, which plots the scores on Tasks A and B.

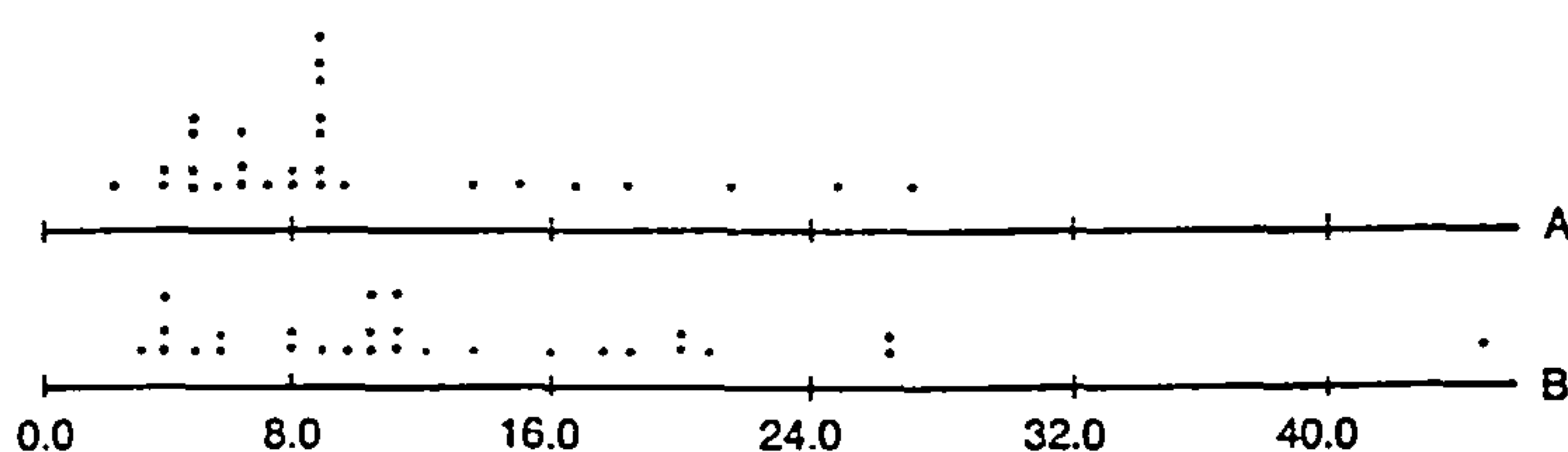


FIG. 1. Scatter plot of scores on Tasks A and B.

This overall impression of consistency is slightly misleading, however, because while it is true of the class as a whole it does not entirely reflect variations in individual performances. Correlating individual scores on the two tasks yields a correlation of 0.507, which suggests a certain amount of inconsistency in individual performance.



TABLE I. Frequency of errors

Text	Words per error	Text	Words per error
A1	6.6	B1	8.5
A2	18.8	B2	44.7
A3	7.3	B3	4.8
A4	9.0	B4	5.9
A5	9.3	B5	26.2
A6	9.1	B6	10.5
A7	5.1	B7	8.1
A8	4.4	B8	5.7
A9	25.0	B9	26.6
A10	9.0	B10	15.8
A11	8.5	B11	9.4
A12	4.5	B12	3.4
A13	6.3	B13	11.0
A14	21.4	B14	17.5
A15	4.5	B15	4.3
A16	14.9	B16	13.6
A17	7.9	B17	8.0
A18	16.8	B18	10.0
A20	13.9	B20	20.3
A21	4.3	B21	4.3
A22	8.8	B22	11.3
A23	4.0	B23	18.0
A24	6.1	B24	20.3
A25	7.8	B25	20.8
A26	26.9	B26	11.3
A27	5.7	B27	10.2
A28	2.7	B28	3.7
A29	8.7	B29	13.0

*Incidence of Non-standard Forms*

The first point to be made from a closer analysis of the errors in these passages is that relatively few of them are of a grammatical or lexical character and can not therefore be attributed to the influence of non-standard dialect, which the Cox Report (1989, 4.9), following a standard linguistic definition, takes to be a matter of “grammar and vocabulary”.

Table II shows the percentage of errors accounted for in terms of spelling, punctuation and other orthographic features.

Only one child, in one passage, has less than half of his errors in these categories. More than 80% of each sample have two-thirds or more of their errors accounted for by these features. Overall, 80% of Sample A errors and 77% of those in Sample B are covered under these three headings. The implications of this with regard to non-standard dialect are clear: it is not the major factor with regard to these children’s ability to handle the conventions of writing in English and teachers

TABLE II. Percentage of errors accounted for by spelling, punctuation and other orthographic features

Text	Percentage	Text	Percentage
A10	54	B9	40
A7	59	B5	50
A27	59	B18	50
A17	62	B29	62
A26	63	B12	63
A22	68	B2	67
A21	69	B7	67
A2	69	B8	67
A6	73	B10	67
A5	73	B22	67
A20	74	B27	67
A12	75	B6	75
A16	75	B3	76
A29	75	B1	77
A4	80	B11	78
A25	80	B20	78
A11	81	B21	78
A13	83	B13	80
A15	86	B25	80
A23	87	B26	80
A1	88	B28	80
A14	90	B17	85
A28	94	B24	85
A24	95	B14	88
A3	100	B16	88
A8	100	B4	90
A9	100	B15	93
A18	100	B23	100

who want their pupils to write correctly need to put their emphasis on spelling, punctuation and related features rather than worrying about the influence of non-standard features of grammar and lexis. It may be objected here that the errors in spelling may be attributed to the influence of accent. Two points must be made to counter that view. In the first place, Cox, as has already been shown, is talking quite explicitly about dialect rather than accent. Moreover, it has long been recognised that the English spelling system does not match, on a one-for-one basis, the sound system of any accent. As Trudgill (1975, p. 48) has pointed out, "English orthography, because its relationship with pronunciation is often not particularly close, does not really favour one accent over any other. As a consequence, problems of reading and spelling are equivalent for nearly all speakers although they are not actually identical in all cases."

*Grammatical Features*

Before looking in detail at the non-standard grammatical features, it must be pointed out that it is by no means a simple matter to be certain that a particular usage derives from a non-standard dialect form of speech. The grammar of Standard English has been particularly well analysed and documented in works stretching back over the centuries; this is far from the case with many other dialects of English (or with many other languages, for that matter). This creates some difficulties for the analyst and, on occasion, for the teacher. As Gannon & Czerniewska (1980, p. 162) note,

In order to differentiate between dialect-based 'errors' and linguistic errors *per se*, the assessor will need to know the features of the dialect spoken by the child. That is, the teacher needs to be informed about the language varieties used by her pupils. Unfortunately, not all dialects of English have been described, and the diversity both within and between different dialects may be considerable.

I have been fortunate in being able to use a short grammar of Tyneside English written by Beal (1989) which has been invaluable, although it can not hope to compare in scope or detail with any number of grammars of Standard English.

Deviations from Standard English grammatical usage account for 12% of the errors in Sample A and 10% in sample B. Only one child made more than six grammatical errors in sample A (average length 172 words) and only one had as many as three on the shorter Sample B with its average length of 103 words. It will be seen that by no means all of the grammatical errors can be attributed to the influence of non-standard dialect speech.

*Verbs*

Of the non-standard grammatical forms, there were 19 different non-standard verb usages, some of which were used by more than one writer.

Three of these non-standard forms are listed by Beal as Tyneside dialect forms: these are the past participles 'give' for Standard English 'gave' (found in five samples); 'took' for 'take' and 'come' for 'came'. (Unless otherwise stated, forms cited were found in only one piece of writing.)

There are four instances of non-standard usage of parts of the verb 'to be'. Two of these seem attributable to the local dialect: "There was 7 groups and we was last". Of the others, one is a use of 'is' rather than 'was' which seems to arise from the writer becoming lost in the complexity of the structure he has produced: "You also had a white sheet of paper with a map on it and in the hall there was a big colour map and you had to go up to it and see what colour your continent is." (To make for easier reading, I have corrected spelling and punctuation throughout, wherever errors are not germane to the point at issue.) The other occurs in the sentence "This is the facts you need." I can find no record of this interrelationship between singular subject and verb and plural subject complement being a feature of



Tyneside dialect, nor does it strike me, a resident of the area for over 20 years, as being one. I suspect that the writer, whose two pieces are among the three with the highest incidence of error, has started the clause and changed his mind in the middle of it.

One instance I am doubtful about is the use of 'need' (a stative verb, according to Quirk & Greenbaum (1973, p. 47)) in the progressive aspect: "We are needing a helicopter." This is not cited in Beal, but some of those whose informed opinion I have sought feel this may be a North Eastern form. If it is, it illustrates another interesting point which is that, since the same pupil writes "we need" a few lines later, it is clear that non-standard and standard forms can co-occur in writing; Cheshire (1982, p. 55) records that, in the study of children in Reading on which she reports,

Although the children in the present study continued to use dialect features in their written work, this does not mean that they were failing to acquire the ability to 'style shift'. Most of the features of Reading English are variable; speakers alternate the non-standard forms with the corresponding standard English forms.

The remaining non-standard verb forms in these pieces of writing seem not to derive from dialect features at all. The great majority (14 out of 15 instances) result from using stem forms where the past tense or past participle is called for. These involve both regular verbs—'need' (three instances), 'fine' and 'finish' (two instances each), 'colour', 'help', 'tidy' and 'enjoy'—and irregular ones—'draw', 'choose' and 'shoot'. The other happens to be an instance of a writer using a past tense/participle form when the stem would have been appropriate—in the sentence "Keith Barrett helped us designed the model."

### *Nouns*

There are 16 instances of singular forms being used where the plural would have been appropriate and one of the converse. Ten of these give the appearance of being one-off slips (four being made by one child). Two forms, however, are examples of a Tyneside dialect feature—'pound' (found in three samples) and 'million' (found four times). As Beal (p. 18) notes, "In Tyneside English, nouns of quantity often have plurals without -s."

### *Other Tyneside Grammatical Features*

The remaining grammatical features which can be ascribed to the influence of Tyneside dialect are more disparate. There is one instance of 'never' as the negative particle, cited as a local feature both by Beal (p. 9) and Jones (1985, p. 167). It appears here in "Shane got fined because he never paid the right price."

A form of verb phrase complementation in which "the infinitive may be introduced by *for to* where Standard English has *to*" (Beal, p. 11) is exemplified by "...we bought all the things we needed for to draw around our piece of card."

One feature that Tyneside English shares with other non-standard dialects is

that "In compound subjects, the objective pronoun may be used as a subject" (Beal, p. 16); this is found twice: "...so me and Laura Cook gave them some of ours" and "...me, Adam and Gavin got twelve."

One final Tyneside usage found in these samples is listed by both Jones (p. 168) and Beal (p. 17), who notes, "The non-standard relative pronoun *what* is used in Tyneside English." This is again exemplified by two writers: "We got all of our bits what we had..." and "...Ann Marie had the same what Amy had."

### *Grammar—summary*

In all there were 91 non-standard grammatical usages, representing about 10% of the errors in these passages. Of these, 22 can clearly be ascribed to the influence of the local dialect. For reasons which have been outlined above, this figure cannot be regarded as an absolutely precise one, but at a level of less than 3% of the total of non-standard forms overall, it can be seen that, even if we allow for some possibility of disagreement over the analysis, the overwhelming majority of those occasions on which children are not conforming to Standard English writing patterns is not the result of their use of non-standard dialect grammar.

What, then, accounts for the remaining 75% of the grammatical errors? It is beyond the scope of this article to explore this question in detail but, apart from the features of verb and noun usage already commented on, the commonest type of error seems to arise from handling the complexities of written structure, especially where this tends to differ from speech patterns: "Everybody had to colour the part of their part of the world"; "we coloured the part of the world our country is"; "our class had made a sculpture made of solid oak"; "when we had to do that we to buy thing pens, scissors, paper." Another common feature with no basis in non-standard dialect was the failure to observe the rule that "The definite article presupposes an earlier mention of the item" which it determines (Quirk & Greenbaum, p. 72). There were seven instances similar to the piece which began "We have a problem because we can't move the model." Other features recurred less frequently—the use of 'it' or 'them' with an antecedent of the wrong number or no antecedent at all, the use of 'and' in the wrong place in lists, and so on.

On the basis of these samples, it is clear that grammar is a relatively minor aspect of the business of writing in accordance with the conventions of Standard English usage and that the interference of non-standard dialect grammatical patterns is a relatively minor aspect of the business of writing in Standard English grammar.

### *Lexis*

The ascription of lexical features to origins in non-standard dialect is perhaps even more difficult than was the case with grammar, so it is important to begin by stressing that only 26 different non-standard usages were found, of which only two (both Tyneside English features) occurred more than once. In all, lexis accounts for less than 4% of the total of non-standard forms, so even if all instances were based on local forms, the overall impact would be quite small. I have checked my own



intuitions on the local basis of the non-standard items of vocabulary with those of a group in Continuing Education in Newcastle University who are undertaking a study of Tyneside English.

Of 32 occurrences of non-standard lexical usage, the following derive from local dialect: using 'lend' for 'borrow' (found in six pieces of writing); using the expression 'to buy off' for Standard 'to buy from' (two occurrences); using the phrasal verb 'to play out' meaning to play outside; using 'mind' as in "Mind, if you don't want to do it..." So, non-standard lexis is rather more likely than non-standard grammar to be based on local dialect forms—about a third of the non-standard vocabulary in these samples derives from Tyneside English. However, this still accounts for only 1% of the overall number of errors, a figure which again suggests that teachers have, quite literally, more important things to worry about.

As with grammar, it is not the purpose of this study to analyse the reasons underlying the other non-standard usages although, again as with grammar, many of them seem to arise from unfamiliarity with written as opposed to spoken styles: "our group had a discussion of what we should do next," "she was pleased in the way we were learning" and so on.

## Conclusion

Perhaps the first point to be made in conclusion is that it would be inappropriate to attach too great significance to the precise figures recorded in this study. While great care has been taken in analysis, there is an inevitable element of subjectivity both in terms of deciding on what should be treated as an error and in ascribing errors to the influence of non-standard dialect, in the absence of a grammar and dictionary of Tyneside English comparable to those available for Standard English. Having said that, it should also be noted that the trends which have been discerned are so marked that the differences which might arise if another researcher were to reanalyse this data are so minor as to give no reason to fear that the general conclusions would be significantly different.

The first of these conclusions is that these children, 11 year olds in an inner city school, do find difficulty in writing in accordance with the conventions of Standard English usage.

It is also clear that the question of "the beginnings of the expectation of Standard English in written work when appropriate by the age of 11" (Cox, 1989, 4.38) is not primarily a matter of the influence of non-standard dialect. It has much more to do with the differences between written and spoken English in terms of the conventions of writing and the differences in structure between the two modes. As Perera (1987, p. 19) suggests, "it is necessary to realize that written language is not merely a transcription of speech; so learning to read and write means not just learning to make and decode letter shapes but also acquiring new forms of language." This, rather than non-standard dialect, is the basis of the great majority of the errors found in these pieces of writing.

This is not to say, of course, that non-standard dialect has no influence at all.



Cheshire (1982, p. 54), in the study in Reading already quoted, notes that "Almost all the grammatical features of non-standard Reading English were used by the children in their written work." It seems probable, given the proportion of the dialect forms listed by Beal and Jones which appear in this relatively small sample that the same would be true of Tyneside English if the present study were to be extended. But this is to look at the issue from the standpoint of the dialectician rather than the teacher. For the latter, what matters is that non-standard dialect forms comprise a very small proportion of those which do not conform to conventional usage. The problem for these children, and for their teachers, lies in the difficulty of mastering the writing system, not in dialect variation. The present study has, I hope, clarified that problem; it has not, of course, begun to solve it.

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## **Appendix 2**

**An Extra Radiator? Teachers' views of support teaching and withdrawal  
in developing the English of bilingual pupils**

**John Williamson**

**Chapter 10 of *Curricula for Diversity in Education* (1992)  
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## Chapter 10

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### An extra radiator?

#### Teachers' views of support teaching and withdrawal in developing the English of bilingual pupils

John Williamson

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*This chapter explores the views of a group of secondary support teachers towards methods of learning support for pupils whose first language is not English. The teachers interviewed argue in favour of support teaching in mainstream lessons, but also see advantages in withdrawal for separate small group and individual work. They describe the ways in which effective support teaching can be hampered by poor organisation, hostile attitudes from some teachers and the sometimes low status of support teachers. Almost all the arguments and issues have close parallels in debates about support for pupils who experience difficulties in learning which do not stem from speaking English as a second language.*

#### 1 INTRODUCTION

It has long been the case that the arguments in favour of developing the English of bilingual pupils in the mainstream classroom have held sway in official pronouncements. As long ago as 1975, the Bullock Report approved of work then current in Bolton and Bradford

where the specially appointed language specialists ... functioned both as teachers and consultants, sitting in on subject classes, analysing the linguistic demands made on immigrant [*sic*] learners in different areas of the curriculum, and offering running help to the children as the class proceeded. This is a much more effective way of working than dealing with pupils in comparative seclusion, which is bad both linguistically and socially.

(DES 1975: 291)

The Swann Report came to a similar conclusion: 'We are wholly in favour of a move away from E2L provision being made on a withdrawal basis, whether in language centres or separate units within schools' and went on to point out a corollary of this, that 'in secondary schools we believe that pupils with E2L needs should be regarded as the responsibility of all teachers' (DES 1985: 392, 394). A



survey of the teaching of English as a Second Language in six LEAs offered further support, noting that

Evidence from the relatively few examples of in-class support by E2L teachers suggests that, where organisation and collaboration between the E2L and subject teacher are good, pupils are able to engage more effectively, than in withdrawal groups, with mainstream work and use English in activities relevant to the subject.

(DES 1988a: 14)

This increased effectiveness arose, they suggest, because 'Pupils covered more areas of the curriculum and were encouraged to learn with their peers. The impact on other pupils of E2L work was also greater when the E2L teacher worked alongside the class teacher' (DES 1988a: 17). The Cox Report, alluding to some of the sources just cited, concludes that 'The implications are that ... where bilingual pupils need extra help, this should be given in the classroom as part of normal lessons' (DES 1988b: 58).

This is not to imply a blanket approval of support teaching at the expense of withdrawal. Swann notes that 'We recognise that in the case of pupils of secondary school age arriving in this country with no English some form of withdrawal may at first be necessary' (DES 1985: 392). HMI point out (DES 1988a: 17), with regard to support teaching, that 'such a pattern of working demands careful planning, effective organisation, genuine co-operation, and frequent review and evaluation'.

Such caveats notwithstanding, there is a consensus, based on the soundest social, linguistic and pedagogical grounds, that the needs of the bilingual pupil are in general best met within the mainstream classroom. The impetus for the present study comes in part from teaching secondary school teachers on in-service courses in English as a Second Language (E2L) and in part from a term spent working in the E2L departments of two comprehensive schools in the North of England, when I gradually became aware that the teachers' attitudes to the debate on support and withdrawal were very complex. This was not because they were unaware of the views sketched above or of the much more elaborate reasoning and research underlying them. Of the six teachers I subsequently interviewed – whose opinions form the basis of this article – two had qualifications at higher degree level with substantial components in the teaching of English as a Second Language, and three others had undertaken at least a one year in-service course in the subject. It seemed to me that it would not only be interesting to explore in some depth the experience and attitudes of these teachers but also that such an exploration could be of great value in helping us to understand something of the forces at work here and to identify areas of practice which might need to be reconsidered if support teaching is to operate at an optimal level.

This study examines the attitudes of six teachers, three from each of two schools. The information presented here was elicited by means of a series of semi-

structured interviews, an approach which seemed best suited to the task of gathering a full range of opinions. A set of questions was taken to each interview and elaborated upon as necessary, and interviewees were encouraged to develop their own points of view as extensively as they wished. The interviews, which varied in duration from about twenty to thirty minutes, took place in the interviewees' schools. Those interviewed constituted about three-quarters of the E2L staff in their schools and were all full-time members of their departments, most having specialist qualifications. All were known to me personally and the interviews were conducted in a relaxed atmosphere which, I trust, encouraged the teachers to say what they really felt rather than simply what they felt they ought to. Responses were not tape-recorded for fear that this might have an inhibiting effect; extensive written records were made at the time. For the same reason, interviewees were assured of complete confidentiality; this is a very sensitive area.

## 2 THE RELATIVE MERITS OF SUPPORT TEACHING AND WITHDRAWAL

The first question put to the teachers was a very broad one: 'What do you feel are the relative merits of support teaching and withdrawal?'

All of those interviewed found merits in supporting bilinguals in the mainstream setting. All bar one mentioned some of the social and personal benefits of this kind of integration, stressing the value for bilinguals of being able to mix with their peers, which was seen as valuable both in terms of enabling the bilinguals 'to be accepted more quickly' and in terms of developing their 'self-esteem' by 'being in the right setting'; the lack of this was seen by one teacher as being the main argument against withdrawal. It was the view of one of the teachers that pupils themselves prefer mainstream settings because of 'the social aspect of joining in with other children' and two others echoed this view, arguing that incorporating bilinguals into the mainstream would yield 'one less aspect in which they're seen as different'. In turn, one argued, mainstream provision has a related linguistic benefit in that it helps with the development of 'conversational language'. The second set of benefits arising from supporting children in the mainstream setting was seen to lie in affording bilinguals 'access to the curriculum which would otherwise be denied'. Further, pupils have 'access to the skills of specialist teachers' which they would not necessarily have if the same ground were covered in a withdrawal setting in which, one teacher pointed out, they would not be learning in context; just being shown the science apparatus, for instance, in the language room was, she felt, an experience of a different order. One interviewee also noted that access to the curriculum in later years was also at stake – for example, if the early stages of science were missed, it might prove impossible to fit in later. There was a general feeling in favour of learning English and working through the curriculum in tandem.

One final benefit of mainstream integration was raised by only one teacher

who commented that children in that situation 'learned their way round the school much more quickly'. They came into contact with more staff and became familiar with them and with the life of the school, the timetable and so on.

The teachers were, then, in favour of support teaching for reasons very similar to those adduced in the introduction; however, by no means did they give it an unequivocal vote of approval at the expense of withdrawal.

One of the perceived drawbacks of mainstream support was summarised very succinctly by one teacher who said 'the syllabus is not available if you don't understand it'. This view was expanded on by a colleague who noted that pupils 'can get very frustrated if they're having language problems – they may sit and do nothing. Support helps with that but can be very limited. History and English can be particularly hard.' It was her view that 'everything hinges on prior consultation ... It's not enough just to have a body in the room.' Support teaching, she argued, is valuable when it is done properly but that can only be the case when it is well planned.

Nearly all of the teachers found some merit in withdrawal on linguistic, social and curricular grounds. One suggested that withdrawal provides a 'secure base to work from', lessening the trauma of having to cope with a new language, a new school and a new culture; students knew 'who to turn to for help'. A more supportive environment was provided in which pupils were 'less likely to withdraw into themselves' and in which they could be 'nursed and encouraged'. Another felt that beginning bilinguals in secondary schools cannot go totally into mainstream but need a 'halfway house'; withdrawal can provide 'a nice little nest for them' and enable them to build their self-confidence. Another teacher noted that there may be a case for help through withdrawal when a pupil is having a hard time and needs security.

Several of the interviewees commented on the linguistic benefits of withdrawal. One argued that the affective filter – 'the ... hurdles posed by the individual's emotional state and motivations' in the terms of Dulay *et al.* (1982) – should be lower because the teacher should be better qualified to teach language. Another suggested that some aspects of language (pronunciation, for example) are 'hard to teach in mainstream – small group work comes into its own'. It was also noted that 'input can be regulated and graduated to avoid confusion and bad language habits'. Perhaps this viewpoint was best summarised by one interviewee who argued that it is 'difficult in mainstream to teach a language as a language'. Teaching can be done through subjects but 'the finer points' may not be taught because, for example, the support teacher cannot intervene when the class teacher is talking.

Three of the teachers felt that there could be advantages from a curriculum point of view in withdrawing students from mainstream for at least some of the time. This view was expressed by one teacher who argued that withdrawal provided a useful back-up to mainstream lessons. She argued that subject teaching could not be thoroughly effective without follow-up and that this was so important that withdrawal was necessary. Another, while making very much



the same point, qualified it by suggesting that while withdrawal offered a useful means of recapping on mainstream lessons, the need for it depended very much on the class teacher's methods – if the lesson was well taught in the first instance, there would be no need for withdrawal.

Only one of those interviewed focused on the drawbacks of withdrawal (as opposed to commenting on the complementary advantages of mainstream support). In the first place, she stressed the importance of having a policy which was clear-cut and which limited the number of lessons from which children should be withdrawn and the length of time over which withdrawal should take place. She pointed to the 'lack of stimulus in being in a language room all day' and argued that 'over-sheltering just delays the process' of integration into mainstream which she characterised as 'the shock of being put out'. There was a difficult period of readjustment but it was one which pupils had to get through and segregating them for too long was not helpful. She also had reservations about withdrawal as a means of supporting the mainstream curriculum (though she had been one of those who saw some merit in this) in that if pupils needed a whole mainstream lesson explained to them perhaps they were being faced with too much and it would be too much for them even in a withdrawal group, from which they might 'just get a handful of words which they'd have got in mainstream anyway'. The children might simply not be ready for a particular section of the curriculum and what they got from withdrawal would not outweigh the benefits of being with their peer group in the mainstream.

The teachers, on the whole, took a balanced view of the relative merits of support and withdrawal, leaning as one would hope towards the former but seeing limitations in it and expressing a feeling that withdrawal is not an option which they would like to see closed to them.

### 3 THE BALANCE BETWEEN SUPPORT AND WITHDRAWAL

Somewhat surprisingly, the support for withdrawal was brought out even more clearly by the second question, which asked what should be the balance between support and withdrawal. All of the teachers seemed to interpret this as a request to say what withdrawal should be used for.

Four of the group perceived withdrawal as providing, in various senses, a shelter for their pupils. One talked of providing 'a safe place where they're out of the public eye and don't need to keep pretending they've understood ... They need somewhere they can say they don't know what a beach is.' A colleague spoke of the greater confidence the children feel in smaller groups and of their having 'a better chance to relate to the teacher'. She noted that her pupils 'often don't speak in mainstream classes' whereas in withdrawal groups they were 'not afraid to experiment with language and risk making fools of themselves'. Further, there was a better opportunity than in mainstream classes to diagnose errors. Finally, one teacher felt that withdrawal met the pupils' need for 'a base to go to with problems'. Set against this, one teacher who mentioned the value of a

'shelter' also felt that there was a danger that children could be made too dependent and that reintegration could be made more difficult; accordingly, in her view, children should never be withdrawn from more than two of the five periods in the school day.

Three of those interviewed discussed the value of withdrawal for pupils newly arrived in an English-speaking environment, although interestingly their views on what should be done differed significantly. One argued that new arrivals should be totally withdrawn for an initial period of four weeks, not being assigned to a class at all. They should cover 'the practicalities – writing, intensive language work – through the subjects of the curriculum'. They should then be gradually fed into lessons over the rest of a term 'as they can cope with each subject'. In her view, practical lessons, if supported, are the best for feeding pupils into. 'The last to go are English, History and RE.' On the other hand, another teacher would hesitate to withdraw even children totally new to this country for more than two out of the five daily periods in her school. More, she would try to limit withdrawal to one period a day unless the pupil was so timid and unconfident that it would do him or her a disservice to be 'pushed out' – but even then two periods a day would be the limit.

Three of the teachers emphasised the value of withdrawal as a means of recapping material which had been covered in a mainstream class. One argued that it was 'much more valuable if you can have a follow-up withdrawal lesson – especially at GCSE level'. In the mainstream lesson, the situation could be unsatisfactory because 'you are swept along by the pace of the class – you have to keep up with the teacher's pace, the whole class doesn't necessarily stop when you want to'. A further advantage of withdrawal, she felt, was that some subjects 'uncover remarkable gaps in children's knowledge of the world' and 'it could be embarrassing to have them filled in public – you need some privacy with them'. One of her colleagues noted that one withdrawal lesson can cover, and reinforce, two or three class lessons. It was also suggested that withdrawal could be valuable in helping students of English as a Second Language who were working for formal examination qualifications.

One teacher saw the need for withdrawal primarily in relation to literacy skills rather than for the development of oracy, which should take place in mainstream lessons. Children would probably (in this region, at any rate) be learning a new script, some may indeed be illiterate in their first language and there was, in her view, no provision for meeting this need in secondary schools.

Two of the teachers, one from each school, explicitly stated that the balance between support and withdrawal should 'depend on the children's needs and the stage they're at', one of them stressing the need for flexibility: 'there should be no set policy'.

#### 4 FEEDING INTO MAINSTREAM

One question which I considered to be quite crucial was that of the basis for feeding children who have been withdrawn back into mainstream.

Four of the teachers felt that this was a matter in which decisions should be made on an individual basis; indeed, one felt that the problems were created in this respect by the fact that 'the hierarchy want to know in advance, for practical reasons', when transfer to the mainstream would take place. She added, 'We resist being pinned down.' The same teacher felt that children (typically new arrivals to this country) should join the mainstream 'as soon as they can cope socially rather than academically', so they would pick up 'appropriate language and ways of working' and become familiar with the ways in which 'a particular subject is communicated'. Ideally, this would be done with support (a widely expressed view). A teacher from the other school agreed that the decision should rest largely on social needs (although she also considered academic needs and ability to be important). She argued that if pupils are 'happy to be in a class' that was 'one of the best reasons for putting them out more'. She was the only one explicitly to mention linguistic criteria here but put little emphasis on them: 'It's easier as they acquire more English – but if we waited for that alone, we could wait for two years.' One of her colleagues felt that introducing children into mainstream 'depends on the nature of the subject and how much support there is'. Essentially, the process underlying all these views is a subjective one; in the words of one teacher, it's a matter of a 'gut feeling'.

This subjectivity worried one of the interviewees, who felt that there 'has to be a time limit'. She took the view that it was dangerous to use 'readiness' as the sole criterion although even she agreed that the time limit should be applied 'in accordance with the specific needs of the child' and recognised that it might be necessary to withdraw a child again if mainstream entry had been initiated too soon.

The remaining teacher saw the advantages in a particular form of long-term withdrawal. She referred to the situation in which bilingual pupils were withdrawn from French (on the grounds that there is no point in them studying French if they are having problems with English). That decision having been taken, the bilinguals have three lessons a week for the first three years in which they can be withdrawn. This teacher felt that even if pupils' English problems were not too severe, this time was still not wasted as it could be used to revise mainstream work and do extra reading.

#### 5 IMPROVING SUPPORT TEACHING

My next question, on how support teaching might be improved, obviously touched on a fairly raw nerve. These six teachers raised over a dozen separate issues, some of them expanded on at considerable length. These teachers clearly feel that there is scope for improvement in the way support teaching operates in their schools.



The issue most frequently mentioned was the need for consultation with colleagues if support teaching is to be effective. Put at its most negative, one teacher complained 'often we don't know what we're going in to, so we can't prepare'. Another noted that it's 'unsatisfactory grabbing fifteen minutes at lunchtime'. More positively, one argued for the need for a contract between the teachers concerned, which would fix aims and objectives and would involve negotiating the scheme of work for the period to be supported. The support teacher should have equal responsibility for presentation, marking and writing reports. Ground rules on such issues as discipline should be agreed beforehand to guarantee consistency and equality of status. She argued that the relationship should be such that the class would see itself as having two teachers for the subject in question. In general, it was felt that there was a 'need to identify exactly the role of each teacher in the process'. Clearly, these teachers felt that there was a major difficulty here and one which could only be resolved by developing enough resources to free staff for consultation.

There was a related cluster of opinions which centred on the relationship between support and mainstream teachers. One interviewee noted a lack of awareness of the support teachers' role, some mainstream teachers seeing themselves as being supported rather than the children and feeling resentful because of this. She also observed that some specialist teachers believe that only other specialists can give support in their subject; she commented that it is 'hard to build up a relationship unless both teachers know what their role is going to be'. A colleague stressed the importance of the support teacher being introduced to the class so that all the children know her name and see that she is there to help everyone; otherwise, she will not have 'proper standing' in the classroom. Another said that she felt 'uncomfortable' when her presence in the classroom was not acknowledged and commented also on the personality factors involved – some teachers were 'welcoming, friendly and open, others difficult'.

Two interviewees commented on the importance of the teaching styles adopted by the mainstream teachers, one going so far as to say that 'success depends on teaching method – for example, if the teacher talks to the class a lot rather than setting tasks, it's very difficult for the support teacher to participate. More project work, where children research and work in small groups would help.' A colleague recommended that class teachers look at ways of teaching which would involve every child – 'not just "hands up" questions'. It was also suggested that more cross-curricular approaches would be beneficial, in that language acquisition would take place in a context in which there would be more prospect of reinforcement; the example given was that of dealing with 'The Normans' in History, Art, Geography and Drama. Another teacher shifted some of the onus onto the support teacher, who needs, in her view, 'a really intimate knowledge of the curriculum' so that she would

not spend so much time standing around waiting for relevant moments where she can step in and give help. We would know that if a particular topic was

being dealt with that at a particular time we could do something more constructive with individual pupils.

The quality of support staff was a point developed at some length by one of the teachers who argued that they should be experienced teachers so that they would have the background and confidence to make suggestions to class teachers, and that they should have some experience of primary school methods and a wide range of subject expertise as well as linguistic knowledge. She also argued for in-service provision to help teachers know what to look for and to recognise problems.

The final major point was made by one head of department, who suggested that support teaching could be more structured from the departmental point of view, with more monitoring of children, a chance to comment on their reports and time to discuss progress with parents so that they would be apprised of their children's position.

## 6 DRAWBACKS AND ADVANTAGES OF SUPPORT TEACHING

On the face of it, this question might seem to overlap rather with some of the previous ones. In fact, the teachers tended to interpret it on a more personal level and their answers yielded some new insights.

Perhaps because I framed the question with the negative aspect placed first, and perhaps to avoid repeating themselves too much, the teachers here tended to concentrate on the drawbacks of support teaching. In terms of negative impact on the teachers themselves, the general position was stated by one interviewee who noted that some of them 'feel they're not seen as proper teachers' (although she added that this was something which didn't 'bother' her). In the words of another, 'I miss not having a classroom and doing what other teachers do, even though I value what I do do.' Sharing someone else's classroom, one teacher noted, was mainly disadvantageous on those occasions when the support teacher didn't know 'her position in the room. Often there's not time to sort this out in advance.' A colleague disliked 'having practically no autonomy in the classroom – you don't feel you belong anywhere in particular'. She went on to stress the importance of making 'your role clear to the rest of the class' and to other members of staff who very often only begin to appreciate the support teacher's value when they see her in operation. Even then, it can be 'very hard to co-operate with other staff', some of whom give all the information needed, but some of whom don't. This was seen by another interviewee as being particularly troublesome when there were 'personality clashes – which is inevitable'. On the other hand, one suggested that 'once you build up relationships there's no problem'.

One specific difficulty raised was that of discipline: 'It can be hard to assert your discipline levels in classes where the class teacher has a different level. It can be hard when the children see you in different situations. It can affect your morale when you are never properly in control, never have your own classroom.'

One teacher felt 'It might help if I always did the same subject areas, built up relationships with staff, had a file of work and knew the syllabus well – but I cover for everything. At times I feel a jack of all trades and master of none.' One of the implications of this view was spelt out by another teacher who suggested that a 'huge staff' would be required to do support teaching 'properly'. One teacher, I suspect, summarised a general fear in saying that the support teacher could suffer 'a lack of self-esteem as a bona fide teacher'. That these difficulties are not entirely one-sided was suggested by one interviewee who noted that the situation can also be difficult for mainstream teachers: 'sometimes the subject teacher can't accept support teaching – it can be inhibiting'.

Only one teacher commented on the drawbacks of support teaching for pupils; she touched on the danger of jealousy on the part of monolingual pupils, the risk of bilinguals becoming too dependent on the support teacher and the possibility that, in a mainstream lesson, too much information might be delivered, the teacher might go too fast or that texts might be used which were too long. Pupils, she suggested, were 'often bewildered by the plethora of things going on'. Further, bilingual pupils often had to do different work from the others because they were lacking in the necessary background.

Set against this, one teacher said how she appreciated the variety offered by the support role: 'It's much more interesting – I meet more staff than normal, help all the children and learn about things I knew nothing about.' This view was echoed by a second teacher. A third focused on the advantages for the pupils: the bilinguals 'learn appropriate English more quickly' and find social benefits; for the monolinguals, there is the possibility of promoting understanding between races, they can see that a bilingual peer 'might be very bright and the situation helps to promote friendships'. I suspect that the general view was summed up by one teacher who felt she had little new to say in answer to this question but did assert her belief that 'the advantages to the pupils outweigh the disadvantages'.

## 7 THE ATTITUDES OF MAINSTREAM TEACHERS

The unanimous view was that the attitudes of mainstream teachers varied: 'Some positively welcome you, some are suspicious and antagonistic.' Mainstream teachers are 'often apprehensive at first' but the consensus was that once they had experienced support work they were 'happy and pleased to have us'. As one interviewee said, 'Once they realise you're an extra body, not there to interfere in lessons, things get better.' Some value the presence of a support teacher because she 'helps with discipline and class management' and helps 'relieve pressure in the classroom'.

However, the position may be more complex than it seems at first sight if we accept the view of one interviewee that 'Some agree to support teaching to seem to be doing the right thing, but they don't really want it.' Certainly, a progression towards acceptance is by no means automatic in these schools – 'Some can't function with another adult in the room, with the best will in the world.' Another



felt that a minority (probably a small one) of mainstream teachers

won't have any support teaching – they tend to feel children should be withdrawn; it makes you wonder what they're doing for them. They don't see language acquisition in context is more meaningful and that there are things other than academic gain that children get from mainstream. They show a lack of understanding of children's needs and will say that new children are not getting anything.

This view was complemented by that of a colleague who held that

The biggest danger is that the teacher thinks that support teaching clears them of responsibility to the bilinguals – so there is no compromise in the lesson, they don't worry about the bilinguals not getting anything, because the support teacher is there and that limits their responsibility.

In her opinion, this situation was 'pretty general'.

One teacher, reinforcing a point made elsewhere by others, noted that some mainstream teachers 'won't let me know what the lesson will be about' so that she was unsure about what they wanted her to do. She had also found that some class teachers would not let her help monolinguals because she was not a specialist.

Finally, one discerned a certain resentment among class teachers, a feeling that support teachers had 'an easy number' and treated them 'like a radiator at the back of the room'.

## 8 THE ATTITUDES OF PUPILS

To some extent there were mixed feelings about pupils' attitudes to support teaching but in general the teachers seemed to take a positive view and felt that their contributions were welcomed on the whole both by bilingual pupils and their monolingual peers.

It must be said, however, that their perception of the attitude of the bilinguals was somewhat equivocal: 'the more sensible appreciate having someone there who'll give extra help'; 'most bilinguals like it'; 'they really appreciate help in the main'; 'once they start becoming proficient, they like to shake it off'.

Several points were raised which might help to explain some of the reservations implicit in those statements: 'some are embarrassed by the thought you might be there for them – they don't want to feel they need extra help'; 'no child wants a minder'; 'they don't like to be highlighted – often the colour of their skin makes them stand out enough'; 'other children get at them if you help and they do well'; 'a few don't like it because it draws attention to them'; 'we often create a situation that is too intense for one or two children'.

The same equivocation was expressed about the attitudes of the monolingual children. All of these teachers were aware that they ought to be helping all the children and most noted that extra help was often welcomed by the monolingual children but the teachers were very sensitive to the dangers of resentment being felt towards the bilingual pupils.

The most pessimistic view was expressed by one teacher who claimed that 'the children generally don't see you as a proper teacher'. Another said that 'ideally' children should see the support teacher 'as another bona fide teacher working with the whole class. They don't always – perhaps the fault of support teachers themselves.' This last comment would seem perhaps too hard a line to be taken by a teacher working under the kind of difficulties outlined here.

## 9 CONCLUSION

The views of teachers such as those interviewed here are important for several reasons. These teachers are very much aware of, and at least broadly sympathetic to, arguments of the kind sketched in the introduction in favour of mainstream support as a means of helping bilingual pupils in the secondary school. However, the nature of their experience gives rise to insights about the specific value of the two approaches to teaching bilinguals which we have been considering, about the problems of working with colleagues and about some of the organisational implications of support teaching.

One thing we can learn from these interviews is that we can envisage an ideal situation as follows: an experienced, relevantly qualified teacher supports pupils in a subject in which she is knowledgeable; she has a clear view of the whole syllabus, a welcoming class teacher and time for consultation; she has a secure place within the structure of the classroom and a role with the class as a whole.

These teachers have shown many ways in which the teaching of bilinguals in their schools could be improved. This in itself may be of value to others in similar situations, for there is no reason to believe that the schools in which they work are unique. Certainly, the reservations they have expressed about the drawbacks of restricting provision to mainstream support are worthy of consideration.

The most worrying issue raised by this study, however, relates to the possibility of bringing about the kind of improvements we have been discussing. If changes cannot be made in respect of some of the problems we have seen, are we in a position in which we have to drastically rethink our provision for bilinguals in the secondary sector? Or are we in danger of condemning these teachers – and their pupils – to an endless struggle which cannot be won?

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